



**Written Evidence to the  
OFMDFM Committee Inquiry into  
Building a United Community**

**Date: 10/10/2014**

**PACT: 2014/39**



working to reduce crime and its impact on people and communities

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Committee for the Office of the First Minister and the deputy First Minister  
Room 285, Parliament Buildings,  
Ballymiscaw, Stormont,  
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10<sup>th</sup> October 2014

Dear Kathy,

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the OFMDFM Committee Inquiry into Building a United Community.

NIACRO is a voluntary organisation, working for over 40 years to reduce crime and its impact on people and communities. NIACRO provides services for and works with children and young people, with adults in the community, and with people in prison and their families, whilst working to influence others and apply all of our resources effectively.

NIACRO receives funding from, and works in partnership with, a range of statutory departments and agencies in Northern Ireland, including criminal justice, health, social services, housing and others.

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the Plan and would be happy to provide further information if that would be helpful.

We look forward to receiving the final document.

Yours sincerely

Pat Conway  
Director of Operations and Public Affairs

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## **NIACRO's submission to the Inquiry into Building a United Community**

### **Introduction**

NIACRO welcomes the opportunity to provide written evidence to the OFMDFM Committee's Inquiry into Building a United Community. We are a voluntary organisation, working for more than 40 years to reduce crime and its impact on people and communities. We provide services for children and young people, people in prison and their families, and adults in the community. The services we deliver inform our policy position and give us the insight needed to provide meaningful comment on policy and legislation. Our response has been developed by our work with people who offend, their families, and people and communities affected by offending behaviour.

NIACRO has been involved in contributing to the building of a united community throughout the life of the organisation. Whilst primarily concerned with the re-integration and resettlement of individuals in the criminal justice system through its work with people with a criminal record, people in prisons, young people at risk of entering the criminal justice system as well as families of those in the criminal justice system, NIACRO has also been concerned with conflict related matters.

### **Best practice and experience**

With respect to the proposed Inquiry's terms of reference, NIACRO is basing its submission on the work carried out through its Base 2 project (working with individuals and families under threat in communities), the Challenge Hate Crime project (a partnership between NIPS and NIACRO, primarily developing a model of intervention with perpetrators of hate crime supported by local, national and international research) and the STEM project (Supporting Tenancies for people from Ethnic Minority backgrounds).

Base 2 has been in existence since 1990 and provides an emergency response service to those people and families under threat of physical violence and exclusion. Since its inception, this project has dealt with approximately 20,000 referrals. Since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, it was hoped that the incidence of informal policing and intimidation would reduce and ultimately wither away. This has proven not to be the case and referral numbers for the past ten years have averaged 1000 per annum. Paramilitary style shootings and assaults as recorded by the PSNI are still significant in number and the level of threat experienced by individuals and families remains high.

However, the characteristics around alleged reason for threats have changed since the early 90s, and Base 2 has been recording hate related incidents since 2009/10. These are mostly concerned with sectarian, racist and sexual orientation hate incidents. It was this work that informed NIACRO's Challenge Hate Crime project.



**Challenge Hate Crime Project (CHC)**

This project was a partnership between NIPS and NIACRO funded under the European Union’s Peace III Programme, managed by SEUPB. It ran from 2009 to 2012 and comprised of two elements: 1) developing an effective model of working with perpetrators of hate crime to reduce the likelihood of their re-offending and 2) research into hate crime in Northern Ireland. In terms of the practice, training manuals were produced for interventionists. The research which informed this practice included analysis of hate crime data in Northern Ireland, an attempt to define sectarianism, the stated views of political parties and drawing from national and international experience. A conference in autumn 2012, “Challenge Hate Crime: Deal with it”, brought together politicians, policy makers, representatives of the statutory criminal justice system, relevant NGOs as well as representatives from communities experiencing hate crime to discuss the key messages from the project. Twelve reports were produced and are available on the NIACRO website at [www.niacro.org.uk](http://www.niacro.org.uk). It was clear during the life of the programme that there were many resisters with respect to addressing hate crime in Northern Ireland and a summary of these is contained in the table below.

**Hate Crime – Audit of Resistors and Solutions  
(Legislative, Structural and Attitudinal)**

	<b>Resistors</b>	<b>Solution</b>
<b>Lack of Definition</b>	No agreed definition of sectarianism	Working definition developed – incorporated into legislation or at least defined operationally
<b>Legislation</b>	No reference to sectarianism/ transgender  Aggravated hostility, a two edged sword	Review and incorporate  Consider whether aggravated hostility is a barrier
<b>Government /Politicians</b>	Lack of agreement in regards to sectarian hate crime  Ambivalence/ ambiguity towards certain groups	Develop position with parties internally  Achieve consensus  Visible leadership  Set up all party working group – develop executive strategy

<b>Society / Community</b>	Denial / ambiguity / fear  Tolerance of types of hate crime  Lack of public outcry	Collective efforts to 'deal with it', eg. reinstate and develop Unite Against Hate Crime
<b>Victim</b>	Perception ignored	Perception accepted  Increased level (amount) / depth (type) of self reporting  Contribute to development of practice and involvement
<b>Perpetrator</b>	Denial / ambiguity / fear	Programme – Opportunity to acknowledge and address acts of hate crime
<b>Intermediaries</b>	Lack of experience dealing directly with topic of hate crime combined with working in criminal justice environment	Build on pilot and develop robust practice based on experience and drawing on practice/resources of others
<b>Department / Agencies beyond Criminal Justice System</b>	No focus on early intervention  Denial / downplaying e.g. bullying in schools	Acknowledge behaviours at early stage and act
<b>Criminal Justice System</b>	Issues in regards to communication / understanding/ denial/ silos	Ministerial commitment to action plan leading to enhanced communication and reduction of hate crime

Although the CHC project has ended, work continues and NIACRO has a place on the European Radicalisation Awareness Network<sup>1</sup> promoted by European Commission as well as the European Network Of De-radicalisation (ENOD).

**Supporting Tenancies of People from Ethnic Minority Backgrounds (STEM)**

The STEM project has been in existence for approximately three months and is a housing floating support service. Influenced by the work of Base 2 and CHC, the STEM project is concerned with intervening where racist intimidation has occurred and seeks to prevent homelessness and maintain (people and families) their tenancies in the community. STEM also seeks to reduce the risk of

<sup>1</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation\\_awareness\\_network/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/index_en.htm)



incidents being perpetrated by engaging with key organisations that support minority ethnic groups. STEM works with district housing staff and broader communities to address the issue of hate crime and contributes to tension monitoring within the Belfast Council area.

### **Good relations**

In our initial comments on the design of the Together: Building a United Community - United Youth Programme, we recommended that the Department needs to engage with young people in defining what good relations is and how they can embrace the concept. We believe that good relations can be incorporated in developing young people's skills and knowledge of wider societal structures and how we all contribute to a vibrant and healthy society.

### **Conclusion**

Building a united community is a vast remit. It encompasses a wide range of stakeholders across all sectors. NIACRO, through the work outlined above, believes that it has a significant contribution to make to this Inquiry. It is work that has a continuing evolving dynamic. NIACRO would take the view that future work needs to be based on the resistors outlined in the above table and advocates that solutions can be found assuming that stakeholders acknowledge and develop their potential role.

NIACRO has framed its work within the context of reducing offending and improving communities with the consequent reduction in numbers of victims. We would take the view that not enough is understood about the typology and quantum of hate crime. Some of the suggestions we propose that would contribute to achieving the aims of this Inquiry are as follows:

- Developing information on hate crimes that defines “who is doing what to whom, where and why”. There is an onus on the PSNI and other criminal justice agencies to collect these statistics upon which a future strategy may be based.
- Develop and implement a bespoke model of intervening with perpetrators of hate crime based on the work carried out by CHC. No such model exists within the jurisdiction of Northern Ireland which means that individuals may be sentenced without having their behaviour addressed (although we are aware some agencies, eg PBNI and YJA are attempting to develop practice).
- There should be a focus by all criminal justice agencies on reducing offending rates and reducing rates of recidivism requiring “tracking” of individual perpetrators.
- Review the current legislation with a view to naming hate crime without enhanced sentencing as this legislation in itself seems to be a barrier to identifying hate crime.
- Utilise the resources in communities identified in the CHC programme drawn from communities affected by hate crime.
- An adequately resourced strategy that states clearly the problem, the process, the outputs and outcomes.