



Michael Foster DL MP
Parliamentary Secretary
Government Equalities Office
26 Whitehall London SW1A 2WH

20/07/2009

RE: INTRODUCTORY MEETING 15 JULY 2009-07-20

I am writing to thank you for a useful meeting, and follow up some of the key points raised during our discussion.

The Bill's adoption of a new regulatory system of enforcement requires civic participation and engagement. Although individual claims and cases will play a critical part in shifting the existing culture, the Bill assumes that society (including BAME and other equality groups) will fully participate and engage in its development and enforcement.

1. Public awareness

Public awareness of the Bill is currently very low. This is particularly true for BAME communities. This conclusion is based on data we have collected through:

- our two consultation events (12/02/09 (100 delegates) and 7/07/09 (60 delegates);
- outreach and contact with our extensive membership and database;
- qualitative survey with BAME organisations.

2. Misunderstanding and misinformation

Using the same data, we have also concluded that BAME communities and organisations are skeptical about the Bill. The key sources of information are tabloids, the internet or word of mouth. This information tends to be inaccurate and divisive. For instance, a considerable section of the BAME community feel that the Bill is part of "a wave of mainstreaming of equalities" whereby race equality is being watered down. The timing of the Bill is also important as it is being introduced within a challenging policy context. For example, BAME communities see the merging of the CRE and the setting up of the EHRC, the Single Group Funding recommendation and the move from grants to commissioning as coordinated changes that aim to dilute the race equality agenda.

3. Democratic engagement and participation

BAME organisations that have been set up to represent BAME communities feel that they have not been adequately involved in the preparation and consultation phases of the Bill. Consultations continue to target organisations that have the capacity and adequate knowledge to participate. Despite the existence of available structures within the BAME third sector, these are yet to be maximised by government.



4. Proposed amendments

ROTA and our national coalition have made two submissions to the Bill Committee which included several recommendations. We also made a separate submission to your Department (on multiple discrimination) and gave evidence to the JCHR's call. We were pleased to see that some of our suggestions have been considered. However, we remain deeply concerned with the narrow scope of the Bill and in particular the way it defines "public functions". We were pleased to hear that the responsible Minister will be able to add to the list of public authorities, but we were concerned with proposed powers for the responsible Minister to remove authorities from the list.

5. ROTA Recommendations

BAME communities have set up organisations to represent them and serve them. The BAME third sector is supported by infrastructure bodies and ROTA is one of those organisations providing voice, representation and advice at a national level. This is a resource readily available to government.

BAME communities do not always trust or read publications from government and EHRC. To gain trust, publications need to ensure that BAME communities feel included and valued. For instance, the May 2009 EHRC publication "Equality Bill: Parliamentary Briefing" has no reference at all to race, BAME or the third sector. Appearances are important and so are reassurances that the Bill is introduced to strengthen protection for BAME groups. This is an obvious but yet important message that needs to be conveyed.

ROTA has already formed a national coalition of BAME and other equality organisations that are ready to work with government and Parliament to make the Bill more accessible to BAME communities. In my letter to the EHRC Chair (dated 24th March 2009), ROTA identified two phases during which the coalition will play a key role in helping to address the problems of engagement, misinformation and awareness. The first phase covers the publishing of the Bill, its discussion in the two Houses and its passing. The second covers its implementation.

ROTA and the coalition could:

- produce a response to the two consultations that your department is currently undertaking by including as many BAME organisations as possible;
- become involved in the development and delivery of the consultation events that your department is delivering to ensure that BAME communities and organisations benefit from them;
- hold its own events and consultation meetings and continue to provide you with evidence of need;



- lobby peers;
- hold training events after the Bill is passed to increase the capacity and awareness of those working within the BAME and equality third sector.

ROTA and the coalition are very pleased to have been engaged by your department and the Solicitor's General Office. Again, I would like to congratulate you on your new post and wish you all the best.

I hope we can continue our very constructive dialogue. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Theo Gavrielides
Chief Executive

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Race on the Agenda

Waterloo Business Centre
Unit 217 & 208
117 Waterloo Road
London SE1 8UL

t: +44 (0) 20 7902 1177
e: rota@rota.org.uk

Registered Charity: 1064975
Company Limited by Guarantee:
3425664

www.rota.org.uk