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## **SHARED FUTURE IS PREREQUISITE FOR COMPETITION ON GLOBAL STAGE**

Community Relations Minister David Hanson has reaffirmed government's commitment to tackling sectarianism and racism in Northern Ireland.

Speaking at The Challenge of Change Convention at the Canal Court Hotel in Newry, the Minister described the publication of the Shared Future policy in March of last year as a "key milestone" in setting out clearly the way forward.

**"For the good intentions to have real meaning and for them to impact on our everyday lives it is essential that they are turned into actions.**

**"The recent launch of the first Triennial Action Plan of A Shared Future is a further important and major step forward. It signposts the clear direction of travel on shared education, shared housing, on tackling sectarianism and racism, and on reclaiming shared space."**

David Hanson also spoke of the plans to develop actions at a local government level.

**"Local government now and into the future will be central to us achieving the objectives of A Shared Future. We are working actively with the Review of Public Administration implementation process across all Departments to ensure that A Shared Future is explicitly part of all the new arrangements.**

**“In education we will promote and prioritise sharing in all levels of education. We have committed that when the decisions are made by the Department on new schools, on reorganisation or rationalisation of existing schools, proposals will have to demonstrate that options for collaboration or sharing on a cross-community basis have been fully explored.**

**“In social development and housing we have set several strategic plans in place to deliver on shared living, dialogue and relationship-building at community level. Within social and economic renewal projects - the promotion of good relations, particularly at interface areas and in divided communities will be a requirement. This will also be a requirement in relation to rural estates.”**

The Minister said it is important to address social and economic marginalisation at the same time as building inter-communal relationships.

**“We need to remove the unacceptable sectarian and racist images that plague our streets if these relationships are to be built. It is very encouraging to see communities themselves already committing to this work.”**

The Minister added: **“Northern Ireland is changing and changing rapidly. This increasing culturally diverse society should not be defined by the challenges it brings, but by the opportunities it presents. So the Shared Future action plan is an opportunity agenda that I, the Secretary of State, my ministerial colleagues and with the commitment of our Departments are resolved to achieve.”**

He concluded: **“It’s now the time to push on. To recognise that, A Shared Future is not only a social and moral imperative but is also an economic**

**prerequisite if we are going to compete and be sustainable on the global stage. It is the new common sense for all of us.”**

**NOTES TO EDITORS:**

A Shared Future: Policy and Strategic Framework for Good Relations in Northern Ireland was published by Written Ministerial Statement on 21 March 2005.

A Shared Future sets out Government’s aim of establishing over time a shared society, defined by a culture of tolerance.

A Shared Future and the Triennial Action Plan can be accessed on the website: [www.asharedfutureni.gov.uk](http://www.asharedfutureni.gov.uk).

The convention was organised by Newry & Mourne District Council and Belfast City Council in association with Louth County Council and facilitated by Mediation Northern Ireland.

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