**Agreed position on Brexit negotiations by key social partners in Northern Ireland**

Four leading social partners representing various strands of society in Northern Ireland have come together on an agreed platform to highlight and promote the uniqueness of the positon of Northern Ireland in any Brexit negotiations.

The 4 social partners are,

* the Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions **(NIC-ICTU)** which represents over 200,000 workers through 24 affiliate trade unions across Northern Ireland,
* the Confederation of British Industry **(CBI)** in Northern Ireland which represents one third of all business in Northern Ireland,
* the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action, **(NICVA)** which represents over 1,000 community and voluntary bodies which employ over 40,000 workers in the sector,
* the Ulster Farmers Union, **(UFU)** which is the largest democratic organisations representing farmers and growers in Northern Ireland.

We believe irrespective of how people voted in the referendum it is essential that we now come together to stand up for and promote the unique interest and voice of Northern Ireland in any such negotiations. Below are 6 key issues which must be addressed to ensure that society in Northern Ireland does not become collateral damage in any Brexit discussions. We believe our intervention is timely particularly given the current political impasse in Northern Ireland. As representatives of workers, business, the community and voluntary sector and the farming community we believe it is essential that our voice is articulated, heard and listened to.

1. **Trade** – Given that uniquely, the majority of Northern Ireland exports (58%) currently go to the EU and 2/3rds of these exports go to the Republic of Ireland, it is vital that an open frictionless border is maintained between Ireland and Northern Ireland; and between Great Britain and the island of Ireland. As a first step, it is essential there is agreement that the UK will preserve the economic benefits of the Single Market and the Customs Union until a final settlement between the United Kingdom and the European Union is agreed and implemented. This will avoid a damaging scenario which will have a potentially significant impact not just on trade but on thousands of jobs in the region.
2. **Migration/Skills and Common Travel** – Given that the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland will become the land border between the UK and EU, it is critical that the Common Travel area as we have known it is preserved. In an attempt to limit the economic shock to Northern Ireland with Brexit it is essential that we have a migration system that both protects migrants and facilitates business to access the skills and labour it needs to sustain itself and grow.
3. **The Good Friday Agreement and peace process** – The Good Friday Agreement is an international peace treaty which has been supported and underpinned in a number of ways by the EU. The outcome of any Brexit negotiations cannot and must not in any way delay the complete implementation or alter the terms of the agreement without democratic consent or undermine the unique and bespoke settlement that the agreement has created within Northern Ireland.
4. **Workers’ Rights** – Uniquely across the devolved governments in the UK the issue of employment law and workers’ rights are devolved and accountable to the NI Assembly. We believe that Brexit must not be used as a pretext to dismantle hard won workers’ rights or to drive down employment standards generally in Northern Ireland.
5. **The social and economic benefits of EU funding** – We are conscious that across a range of sectors the society and economy at large in Northern Ireland has benefited significantly from EU funding over the years. Leaving the EU will result in a loss of £500m a year including over £325m a year for agriculture and fisheries alongside funding for building the peace, cross community and border cooperation, rural development, infrastructure projects, supported employment, and potentially loss of access to programmes important for medical and other research. It is essential that the outcome of any Brexit negotiations addresses and ensures the social and economic benefits from such funding is sustained.
6. **The role of the social partners in the Brexit process** – Since the outcome of the Brexit process will profoundly affect the lives of this and future generations we as the representative voice of organised labour, business interests, the community and voluntary sector and the farming community must have a role to input and articulate our concerns and the interests of those we represent across the society and economy of Northern Ireland.

The issues above must be considered and addressed in order to ensure that the unique circumstances which prevail in Northern Ireland are acknowledged and addressed in the context of Brexit and that the progress this society has made in recent times can be sustained.