I attended the Equal Opportunities Committee meeting this morning (20/02/14) to hear the evidence session with Dr.Duncan Morrow and Michael Rosie.

BEMIS Scotland is the national ethnic minorities led umbrella body supporting the capacity development of ethnic and cultural minority communities in the voluntary sector. We are strategic partners to the Scottish Government in the development of the Race Equality agenda and in this setting have taken heed of the advisory report released in December 2013.

BEMIS Scotland endorse the initial report entitled; ‘Independent Advice to the Scottish Ministers’ and advocate the need to foster a cultural shift in our interpretation of ‘Sectarianism’ and the need to move beyond settings in which ‘difference’ has been a catalyst for hostility.

We particularly noted the comments of Dr.Morrow that sectarianism should not be an isolated societal issue, and strategic plans moving forward should be delivered within the broader framework of equalities work.

In addition, we noted with interest the comments of committee member Siobhan McMahon MSP in relation to point 3.8.3 of the report that;

“Sectarianism in Scotland has at times been closely associated with anti-Irish prejudice. However, the two are not identical. The religious dimension is distinctive in sectarianism. Anti-Irishness, in a cultural sense, is clearly a form of racism and should be named as such”.

BEMIS Scotland share the analysis that migration trends, census outputs and characteristics of identity as acknowledged within the Equality Act.2010 point towards a re-definition of ‘Race Equality’ which recognises both visible and invisible minority communities.

We support the ethos of the report which calls for individuals and organisations to face up to the challenges of ‘sectarianism’ and encapsulate this new ethos in future work programmes.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with representatives of the Equal Opportunities Committee within the context of the report in the weeks ahead.

We believe that the committee can play a crucial role in facilitating the integration of the report’s recommendations into the broader equality agenda and would support such a measure.
We would be happy to facilitate this at our offices in Glasgow or alternatively at a venue which is best suited for yourselves.

I look forward to meeting you.

Danny Boyle
Equality and Parliamentary Officer
BEMIS Scotland
20 February 2014