

‘Commitment is like a seed and our actions are the harvest’

THE North West Migrants Forum’s Black History Month programme formally kicked off on October 16 with a conference in Belfast’s Indian Community Centre.

Titled ‘From Commitment to Action: Building Fairer and More Inclusive Public Institutions’ the event brought together representatives from government, policing, faith communities, the legal sector, policy and the arts to explore how public institutions can build greater trust and belonging.

The conference was opened by Shannon Doherty of the Committee on the Administration of Justice who invited her colleague, CAJ’s Senior Solicitor Úna Boyd to the stage.

After Úna set the context for the day’s proceedings, she joined a discussion panel alongside Chair of the Irish Muslim Peace and Integration Council Shaykh Dr Umar Al-Qadri and Policy Officer with the African and Caribbean Support Organisation Northern Ireland (ACSONI), Takura Makoni.

The panellists explored a wide range of issues including why institutions sometimes struggle to translate good intentions into measurable outcomes and what meaningful accountability look like when commitments are not delivered.

Moderating the panel was NWMF Board member Sean Awonuga.

Keynote speaker for the day was Keith Fraser who has served in many roles, including as Chair of the Youth Justice Board, a member of the Criminal Justice Board, former UK Commissioner on Race and Ethnic Disparities and in senior operational roles with the West Midlands Police and the Metropolitan Police Service.

Following Keith’s contribution, it was the turn of the second panel comprising the PSNI’s Hate Crime Lead Superintendent Joanne Gibson, Keith Fraser and Senior Policy Manager with the NI Equality Commission, Paul Noonan.

Superintendent Gibson addressed the racist violence that has gripped parts of Northern Ireland. She said hate crime was the only crime category for which she receives an email every single day. Officer Gibson added that tackling hate crime and racially motivated crimes was a top priority for her department and would remain so.

The final panel of the day brought together representatives from the Home Office, Takura Makoni, Agrippa Njanina of National Museums NI and award-winning artist Valda Jackson.

Valda Jackson spoke passionately about her work and how Black history and the legacies of empire continue to influence what she creates.

On hand to reflect on the day of discussion and to bring the conference to a close was author Jessie Alozie.

He described all contributions as “powerful” and said such conversations could only be had when people sit down, respect each other and share their views.

Jessie added, “Commitment is like a seed and our actions are the harvest. Let us reap the harvest by now moving from commitment to action.”