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Business Leaders Unite To Tackle 'Cinderella' Of Faith In Workplace

- **Trevor Phillips gives show of support for Employers Forum**
- Visit www.efrb.org.uk for more

The Employers Forum on Belief (EFB) held its first public meeting today at the House of Lords, hosted by Lord Dennis Stevenson of Coddanham and with speakers including Trevor Phillips, Chair of the Equality & Human Rights Commission.

The EFB was established in 2004 by a small group of employers. It quickly became a powerful network – a safe place to talk about sensitive issues for employers committed to making the most of their diverse workforces.

Trevor Phillips, Chair of the Equality & Human Rights Commission comments, “I am thrilled to have been part of today’s event and firmly believe that the issues the EFB are addressing are of vital importance. The workplace is the single most important arena for questions on this agenda to be addressed and for diversity to be seen as a benefit, not a burden. We know that the coming years will see more migration, which will lead in turn to more diversity and a need for employers to reach outside of their cultural comfort zones in order to find their workforce. There are real, practical issues to be dealt with and employers cannot afford to ignore them.

“Issues surrounding religion and belief and non-belief must not be trivialised by the media coverage of legal wranglings. In fact I believe that the worst way to resolve such cases is in court. The best way is by creating dialogue, sharing experience and by forums such as the EFB helping to find new ways of dealing with these issues. The EFB will be vital to employers and will help keep these cases out of the court room. That's why we look forward to working closely with the EFB.”

Rachel Kryz, Director of the Employers Forum on Belief (EFB) comments, “The current debate around an individual’s right to express their religious or other beliefs at work and an employer’s need to project a corporate identity really demonstrates the complexity of this issue. It is easy for employers to feel that whatever their good intentions they run the risk of inadvertently hitting a raw nerve when faced with this issue. The EFB offers practical guidance and is not

affiliated to any religious group or philosophical belief. This is about employment; employers and employees.”

Lord Stevenson comments, “I was delighted to host today’s event and to support the work of the EFB. It is imperative that employers engage with these issues and are prepared to discuss and share what is and isn’t working. Everyone has an opinion on the high profile cases, but employers are dealing with this everyday and having to make very difficult decisions, the consequences of which are significant regardless of the outcome.”

Caroline Waters, Director of People and Policy at BT and Chair of EFB comments, “The EFB aims to ensure employers feel confident in making decisions about religion, belief and non belief at work. We want employers to not only comply with the law but to understand the changes they could make to enable everyone - whatever their faith, belief or non belief - to contribute and develop at work. Getting employers together to talk about the issues they face and the solutions they have developed has really helped create the sort of practical advice and guidance that employers want and need.”

Krys continues, “We at the EFB believes that employers need Government, parliamentarians and the commission to support them and their diverse workforces by providing clear regulations, adequate guidance and the opportunity to have their views heard. In return employers have a lot to contribute to the ongoing dialogue around social cohesion and the fight against discrimination.

“The forum has now been extended in order to extend its reach to a wider constituency of employers. In December we launched the EFB website (www.efrb.org.uk) to share experiences, encourage debate and develop good practice. We also published the first quarterly EFB e-bulletin and any employer interested in religion and belief issues can sign up to receive this bulletin by visiting the website. On February 13th we will be running a conference to explore these issues further – a must attend event for anyone interested in this agenda.”

A double shot: twice the strength in one hard hitting conference

- 13th February, in Westminster, London.

Please visit http://www.efa.org.uk/latest/events_13February08.asp for more details and to register.

- Ends -

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The Employers Forum on Belief

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The Employers Forum on Belief (EFB) was founded as an informal network of employers interested in religion and belief at work in 2004. The forum offers employers practical guidance and shares good practice around issues such as dress codes, religious holidays, the inter-relationship between religious belief and other diversity strands and conflict in the workplace. It is not affiliated to any religious group or philosophical belief and is concerned with employment; employers and employees.

The Employers Forum on Belief is facilitated by the Employers Forum on Age, a registered charity, number 1101366. Registered company number 4549009, a company limited by guarantee and registered in England. Registered Address: 3rd Floor, Downstream, 1 London Bridge, London SE1 9BG. VAT Number: GB 830 3914 47