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## **Northern Ireland: Mgr. Martin writes to Equality Commission after Belfast Telegraph's refusal to print an advert declaration by Bishops**

The Belfast Telegraph newspaper sought to alter the wording of the statement that the Catholic Bishops of Northern Ireland wanted to publish, as a paid advertisement, prior to the elections on 2 May 2022. The Bishops' comments on abortion were questioned by the newspaper. The Bishops refused to change the wording of their statement that was ultimately not published. And the money was returned. According to the Irish Bishops' Conference Press Office, this has been made public now because Archbishop Eamon Martin has written to the Northern Ireland Equality Commission seeking its advice on whether, in cases like this, there is an obligation to respect the principles of equality and non-discrimination. The Archbishop also asked the Commission to provide "guidance to commercial organisations providing advertising services in respect to refusing to carry such advertisements on the basis of the religious opinion expressed, where such an advertisement satisfies all other statutory advertising requirements". Indeed, according to the Bishops, the issue has implications "for the right to religious freedom and equality of treatment for people of faith when accessing services from a commercial organisation". "We believe there are many in the Catholic community, and in other faith-based communities, who are deeply concerned about the decision of the Belfast Telegraph", the letter reads. For this reason, "we believe it is important that we engage the various statutory agencies" in a public debate on the principles and rights involved.

Valentina Bombelli