

# Christmas is coming...

For a number of years employers and organisations such as local authorities have been concerned over whether we should celebrate Christmas. Is it right, given the variety of ethnic backgrounds of people in Great Britain today that Christmas decorations should be put up and nativity plays be performed in schools?

Over the years there have been attempts to neutralise Christmas with names such as 'Winterval' and cards offering 'holiday greetings'. Is this something that employers should worry about? As Christmas is approaching do we feel a twinge of guilt about celebrating Christmas in the workplace? Is it potentially discriminatory to have Christmas festivities at work, or is it ok to stick some tinsel to your computer?

Last year, the newly formed Equality and Human Rights Commission attempted to rectify the situation. The Commission was formed as a result of the joining together of the Equal Opportunities Commission, the Commission for Racial Equality, and the Disability Rights Commission. It opened on 1 October 2007 with the aim of eliminating discrimination, reducing inequality, protecting human rights and building good relations, to ensure that everyone has a fair chance to participate in society. With those aims in mind, the Chair of the Commission, Trevor Phillips, together with senior

figures from the Hindu, Sikh and Muslim communities issued a joint statement saying that Christmas in Britain should be celebrated and that it was wrong to allow this holiday to fuel community tension. When other festivals are celebrated, playing Christmas down in public places for fear of offending other religions should not be necessary.

Another interesting observation, which comes to light in the Commission's statement, is that people from a variety of different religious backgrounds, not just Christian, enjoy the traditions of Christmas and take part in them. Christmas decorations, food such as turkey and the trimmings, and a welcome holiday period from work are already viewed by many as simply traditional rather than religious and Christmas is an event enjoyed by all sorts of people from a wide variety of cultures... so anyone for a mince pie?!

