

WHY NORTHERN IRELAND MUST REJECT TRUMP'S AUTISM MYTHS

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After watching the White House coverage last night, I could not sleep. What had I just witnessed? Was this really about autism? Was it about supporting autistic people and their families? Clearly not.

President Trump admitted he could not understand the rise in autism, claiming he had been *"thinking about it for decades."* He has endless resources at his disposal and, by his own design, surrounds himself only with agreeable voices. The question is whether this is about autism at all, or whether it is about closing off a personal curiosity in a way that suits his ideology.

I spend a lot of time with autistic people. I like autistic people. I enjoy their company, regardless of whether they have learning disabilities, are non-speaking, or have low or high support needs. To speak of curing, ending, or preventing this wonderfully diverse population into 'not being' is beyond unpalatable. Autism is not an illness to be eliminated - it is a natural variation of human neurology.

What Trump describes as the 'difficulties' and 'limitations' of autistic people are not inevitable. They are products of social and systemic barriers. If society shifted, showed grace, and built inclusion into its foundations, the so-called *"horrible, horrible crisis of autism"* would evaporate. The crisis lies not in autistic people but in how we treat them.

And yet, rather than grapple with this truth, Trump turns instead to unsubstantiated claims. He suggests, without evidence, that paracetamol might cause autism. He relies on maybes, rumours, and half-thoughts, admitting, *"I'm not so careful about what I say."*

What he delivered was not clarity, but uncertainty. What he offered was not evidence, but conjecture. His language was inflammatory and offensive, though it need not be repeated to make the point.

Trump's rhetoric is dangerous. It fuels public fear. It piles guilt on parents. Worst of all, it risks telling autistic people that their very existence is a

problem to be solved rather than a life to be valued. We cannot allow such harmful misinformation to seep into Northern Ireland unchallenged.

The White House may have a louder microphone, but volume does not equal truth. Here in Northern Ireland, we have a duty to build policy on evidence, on rights, and on respect.

We do not need to know the “cause” of autism to know what matters most - autistic people in Northern Ireland belong, their voices matter, and their dignity must always be respected.

That is why I call again on Ministers and MLAs to stand publicly with autistic people and to endorse the vision: *“A Northern Ireland where autistic people of all ages know they belong, feel valued, and are supported to be their whole authentic selves.”*

Anything less leaves a vacuum into which misinformation and false narratives will rush.

Responsibility belongs to all of us. We must reject unfounded claims and reaffirm our commitment to dignity, inclusion, and truth.



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