

**Report of the UPR Public Consultation Meeting on Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> May 2011**  
**A0006, Institute of Technology Sligo**

38 people signed the attendance sheet.

- Presentation by Olive Braiden, Irish Human Rights Commission
- Presentation by Stephen O'Hare, ICCL / Your Rights Now campaign
- Presentation by Anne-Maree Quinn, Pro Life Campaign
  
- Contributions from the floor. Issues raised were as follows (in no particular order):
  - **Criminal justice system**
    - One speaker recommended that human rights groups check the records of the Special Criminal Court, and also analyse records relating to the Offences Against the State Act. Speaker mentioned his distrust of judges and lawyers; lack of transparency and consistency.
  
  - **Family issues** – several speakers
    - According to international conventions, the family founded on marriage is fundamental to the well-being of society. Ireland is failing to protect family rights by not placing the family founded on the marriage between a man and a woman at the centre of policy decisions. There should be a dedicated Government Department dealing with protection of the family.
    - One speaker highlighted a personal case where he felt that a judicial separation was forced on him; judicial separation should require the consent of both parties.
    - Civil partnership is a positive step forward but there are still significant gaps, for example, non-enactment of the tax laws that accompanied the Bill. These should be enacted immediately.
    - There is still no provision for the rights of children in same sex families. Their rights should be guaranteed.
  
  - **Gender and right to privacy issues**
    - The State should put in place a national strategy to combat homophobia in conjunction with suicide awareness, focussing on schools.
    - One speaker spoke of his opposition to sex education in primary schools. He also felt that there was a campaign of gay propaganda in schools under the guise of information about homophobic bullying.
  
  - **Justice for Magdalenes**
    - Government should establish an independent, statutory investigation into crimes against the 100,000+ women and girls who were detained. This has been called for by the IHRC and supported by the UN Committee Against Torture.
  
  - **Women's issues**
    - Issue of poor reporting of domestic violence. Sanctions for perpetrators of domestic violence against women are inadequate, particularly if the couple is not married or has no children in common. The current system discriminates against victims who do not have children with or who are not married to their abusers.
    - There should be positive action measures to facilitate more involvement by women in politics. Political parties should put forward more women at all levels.

- The State should provide access to affordable childcare, as childcare is a major barrier to women's involvement in the workplace.
- **Trafficking**
  - Exploitation of people in the sex industry; the change that shifts the crime from the victim of trafficking to the purchaser was welcomed.
  - Ireland needs stronger legislation to decriminalise the victims of trafficking.
- **Reproductive rights / abortion / right to life** (many speakers)
  - UPR consultation meetings are a ploy to introduce abortion into Ireland by hiding behind the UN. Most Irish people do not want to murder innocent unborn babies. Abortion was perfected by the Nazis and over 54m babies have been aborted in the US; the Irish people do not want that.
  - If we do not protect the fundamental right to life of the unborn, all other rights are meaningless. Abortion is murder. Urged Government to do everything possible to acknowledge that life is from conception to natural death.
  - Human dignity should be protected at all times; Ireland is the safest place in the world in which to give birth, making it a good place for the unborn child. The Constitutional protection for the unborn child must be upheld by the Government. 3 referenda and several polls have shown that the Irish people want to keep the ban on abortion.
  - Irish Government should get off the fence and defend Ireland's pro-life stance, instead of hiding behind international rulings
  - UN should set example for the world and work to eradicate abortion worldwide. UN should also defend the Christian churches, which are under constant attack in the media.
  - The drafter of the original UN Declaration on Human Rights refused to include the right to abortion on the basis that it would mean the end of civilisation; the medical facts have not changed since then.
  - The Constitution provides adequate protection for the unborn; we should not tamper with it.
  - We should also protect the human embryo from destructive research, and focus on adult stem cells instead of embryonic stem cells for research purposes.
- **'Your Rights Right Now' submission**

Several speakers expressed concerns about the Your Rights Right Now document by a civil society coalition coordinated by the Irish Council for Civil Liberties, which was submitted to the UN Stakeholder Report and the National Report. Two main points were raised:

  - Protest about the inclusion of Section 12, "Women's Reproductive Rights", which recommends repealing the Offences Against the Persons Act 1861 (criminal sanctions for those who have abortions and those assist them), and enacting legislation to clarify the circumstances under which abortion may be lawful, as recommended by the European Court of Human Rights.
  - The endorsement process used by the Your Rights Right Now campaign. Many speakers said some groups listed as endorsing the document who sought to withdraw endorsement had been told that this was not possible. Speakers alleged that some groups listed as endorsers have not been in existence for some time.
- **Migrant / asylum issues**

Several speakers:

  - Domestic violence is an issue in direct provision accommodation, with little protection for the abused spouse.

- Problems with the system – speaker cited a local case in which the father of an Irish citizen child, married to an Irish citizen, has been deported.
  - System of direct provision should be abolished. Facility in Sligo is overcrowded, the roof and toilets leak and there are inadequate cooking facilities. Food may not be brought to rooms.
  - Long periods in direct provision causes emotional trauma.
  - Ireland has the lowest naturalisation rate in Europe. In other countries, up to 70% of applicants are allowed to remain, but in Ireland, fewer than 2% are given permission to remain.
  - People spend up to 10 years in direct provision, unable to work, study or travel. They are restricted social activities. This will create social problems for the country into the future.
  - The system denies Irish people the celebration of diversity.
- **Rights of people with disabilities** – several speakers
    - Ireland should ratify the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities as a matter of urgency. This is an equality issue and an inclusion issue.
    - People with disabilities on lower incomes have been disproportionately affected by the recession.
    - Ireland should move to a social model of disability services.
- **Environmental rights** – several speakers  
 Communities should have the right to be consulted on decisions that affect them; human rights are linked to environmental rights. Concern about oil-drilling in the North West. Ireland should ratify the Aarhus Convention (UNECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters).
- **Misuse of Irish airspace**  
 One speaker said that the UN should investigate Ireland's record in allowing rendition flights through Irish airspace.
- **UPR process**
    - UPR consultation meetings are a ploy to introduce abortion into Ireland by hiding behind the UN.
    - Another speaker stated that the sham of public consultation was a ploy to convince the 'mob' that they are being listened to and a tool to pretend consensus exists for any decisions made.
    - Concern from speakers about how we will decide on the issues in the National Report based on meetings and whether a large turnout by a particular campaign would mean more weight would be given to their view.
    - If the IHRC is State-funded, why will the Government's report be different from the IHRC submission? Concern about taxpayers' money spent on the UPR process and on the IHRC.
    - UPR process is an attempt to water down the Constitution.