



Human Rights Commission meeting with local groups on gender and related human rights issues

Thursday April 22nd 2004, Board Room, Plassey House, UL
2pm-4pm

Draft Agenda

Chair: Dr. Breda Gray, Women's Studies, Department of Sociology, UL – Welcome

Dr. Maurice Manning, President of the Human Rights Commission – General introduction to the work of the Human Rights Commission

Dr. Katherine Zappone, Introduction to the Commission's work on gender and related human rights issues

Local NGOs and other groups present the work of their organisations and the gender related human rights issues that arise in their work

1. Deirdre Cronin, Thomond House (unit for homeless women)
2. Maria O'Dwyer/Brigid Casey, Limerick Traveller Women's Group
3. Monica McElvanny and Mary Daly, Adapt House (refuge for abused women and their children)
4. Anne Marie Flannigan, Schizophrenia Ireland
5. Kieran Harrington and Maeve Meaney, Knocknalisheen Accommodation Centre for Asylum Seekers, Meelick
6. Rosemary Fitzgerald and Joanna Wagstaff, Suimhneas, (homeless unit for women with children)
7. Our Lady of Lourdes Community Action Centre, Rosbrien
8. Geraldine Clohessy, Moyross, Community Development Centre
9. Eileen McGlynn, Doras Luimnigh, (development organisation for refugees and asylum-seekers)
10. Majella O'Connor, St Mary's Community Development Project
11. Wendy Goggin, Southhill Domestic Abuse Project
12. Ger South, Limerick Parents of the Mentally Handicapped
13. Limerick Rape Crisis Centre

Discussion

4pm Close

Summary: the HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION Public Consultation

Thursday 22nd April 2004

Board Room, Plassey House, UL

Chair: Dr. Breda Gray, Women's Studies, Department of Sociology, UL.

Introductory Remarks:

Dr. Maurice Manning – introduced the HRC and outlined the role of the HRC.

Dr. Katherine Zappone – outlined the work of the HRC in relation to gender and women's rights.

Presentation by local NGOs and other groups of the work of their organisation on gender and related human rights issues:

1. Monica McElvanny and Mary Daly, Adapt House (refuge for abused women and their children)

The representatives of Adapt House highlighted some of the issues of concern that affect abused women and their children. They pointed to the need for training for the judiciary and the Garda Síochána to raise awareness in relation to all the forms of violence that women experience. They highlighted the need to audit the consistency of the application of the law and the need to review garda policy in relation to violence against women. They stated that the legislation in the area including the Non-Fatal Offences Against the Person Act 1997 and the Domestic Violence Act 1996 should be reviewed to ensure that there are no gaps in the law. They also pointed out that the gardaí should make better use of existing legislation to ensure prosecutions. In relation to Traveller women, they questioned how culturally appropriate a barring order is for Travellers because of their communal living arrangements. They also pointed out that Traveller women find it more difficult to access alternative accommodation when they are forced to leave their home.

2. Anne Marie Flannigan, Schizophrenia Ireland

The representative of Schizophrenia Ireland highlighted the fact that the disability sector in general does not recognise the distinct experiences of disabled women. In relation to women with mental health difficulties she pointed out that following involuntary committal there are no clear guidelines in relation to what happens to the children of the woman and that this is a particular cause of concern for lone parents. Within mental health institutions she pointed out that these institutions are closed spaces and that there is a lack of advocacy and a lack of awareness by people about their rights. In relation to medication she stated that there is a lack of information about the side effects of some of the medication. She stated that very often women have no choice about the gender of their psychiatrist. She also highlighted the fact that women with mental health difficulties are not encouraged to have children and that disabled women have been subjected to enforced sterilisation.

3. Kieran Harrington and Maeve Meaney, Knocknalisheen Accommodation Centre for Asylum Seekers, Meelick

The representatives of the Knocknalisheen Accommodation Centre stated that they are involved in teaching asylum seekers and refugee women how to read and write English and

also aim to build their confidence and self-esteem. It was stated that the statements of the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform in relation to the citizenship referendum were extremely unhelpful. He pointed out that asylum seekers and refugee women have no access to counselling for the trauma that many of them suffer as a result of persecution in their country of origin. He stated that integration of asylum seekers and refugees should be based on participation and interaction.

4. Ger South, Limerick Parents of the Mentally Handicapped

The representative of the Limerick Parents of the Mentally Handicapped highlighted the delay in the publication of the Disability Bill and stated that the legislation should be rights based and should provide for an individual needs assessment and a right of appeal where the necessary resources are not being provided. He stated that disabled people and their families are extremely frustrated as a result of the ongoing delay and continuing neglect of successive governments.

5. Geraldine Clohessy, Moyross, Community Development Centre

The Community Development Worker in Moyross highlighted the extreme disadvantage and poverty of the people living in Moyross. In Moyross there is a 28% rate of unemployment and 62% of the population of Moyross have left school early. She highlighted the fact that 55 young boys have no place in secondary school for the coming year and the fact that they are from Moyross is preventing them from getting a place in secondary schools. She pointed out that there is a high percentage of lone parents in Moyross and that the lack of childcare is the main obstacle preventing them from participating in further education and employment. There are a very limited number of crèche facilities in the area. She also stated that when people state they are from Moyross on their CV's this often prevents them from getting employment.

6. Eileen McGlynn, Doras Luimnigh (development organisation for refugees and asylum-seekers)

The problems being experienced by asylum seekers when they are attempting to register to vote in the local elections was highlighted. The ID cards that asylum seekers hold are not recognised for the purposes of registration and this has prevented asylum seekers from registering to vote. There is a lack of transparency in relation to the grounds on which leave to remain is granted. The delay in issuing documents for travel, family reunification and the right to work has a negative effect on persons who are declared to be refugees. For those persons who are eventually recognised as refugees the time spent in the asylum process is not regarded as residency, therefore they will have to wait a further three years to benefit from social welfare entitlements. This will prevent them from engaging in education and updating their skills.

7. Patrick McCue, Gay and Lesbian Society, UL.

The representative from the Gay and Lesbian Society highlighted the lack of recognition of long term relationships for same sex couples. He also noted that there has been very little activism around gay and lesbian's rights and that the issue is not regarded as an urgent one.