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## Children's Rights Firmly on the Agenda

The Children's Rights Alliance remains committed to constitutional reform. In November the Joint Committee on the Constitutional Amendment on Children will be producing their recommendations. We are at a critical juncture and I call on all our member organisations and friends to continue to advocate the need for a children's right amendment. The Alliance has written an open letter to the Taoiseach requesting a meeting to discuss our concerns and urging the Government not to depart from its firmly stated commitment to children's rights.

We maintain that constitutional change is necessary — and the only possible route — to provide express rights in the Constitution in order to recognise children as individual rights-holders, to ensure all children are treated equally within the Constitution and to ensure that the judiciary and legislature base their decisions in relation to children on the 'best interests of the child' principle.

The Alliance is fully aware that, following the defeat of the Lisbon Treaty referendum, another referendum holds little attraction to the Government, but to put this factor above the rights and needs of 1,036,034 children in Ireland is not acceptable. While we welcome and congratulate the Government for exploring all options, including legislative proposals on child protection issues, we have said, in no uncertain terms, that constitutional change to strengthen children's rights is non-negotiable.

Now is the time for leadership and action, and we will continue to advocate for a referendum on children's rights. Constitutional change is an essential step for Ireland to fully realise its commitments under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. We will continue to support members of the Joint Committee on the Constitutional Amendment on Children in keeping their minds on the job in hand and concentrate on delivering solid text for a children's rights amendment in November.



Taoiseach Brian Cowen received a letter from the Alliance



Jillian van Turnhout, Chief Executive

### COMMITMENTS TO REFERENDUM — over the last ten years

- *Action Programme for the Millennium*, the programme for government in 1998, set, as a key priority, 'a constitutional amendment to underpin the individual rights of children'.
- In November 2006, the Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern TD, announced the Government's intention to hold a referendum to amend the Constitution so as 'to put the rights of children in a central place in our Constitution. In that way, the Irish people can show the value we attach, in the words of the 1916 proclamation, to cherishing all the children of the nation equally'.
- The 2007 *Programme for Government* states that 'the fundamental law of our land should fully reflect our commitment to value and protect childhood' and calls for 'a new dedicated Article on Children'.
- The opposition parties have also backed constitutional change, with Fine Gael asserting that 'the issue of children's rights' ought to be 'dealt with' in order to 'take account of changes in society and children's rights' and both Labour and Sinn Fein expressing the need for our laws to conform with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.



## Member Focus Pavee Point

Pavee Point is a partnership of Irish Travellers and settled people working together to improve the lives of Irish Travellers through working towards social justice, solidarity, socio-economic development and human rights. Travellers are a small indigenous minority, who have been part of Irish society for centuries. Travellers have a long shared history and value system, with their own language, customs and traditions. Pavee Point is a voluntary organisation and has a long history in developing and delivering equality and diversity in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), as well as other sectors.



EDeNn is a new, national network which has grown out of the work of Pavee Point's 'éist' project. Its vision is to promote, respect and support the right of every child and adult to participate as equal and active citizens in early childhood care and education, to be assured of their rights, and be free from all forms of individual and structural discrimination, including racism, sexism, ableism, and classism.

The network brings together organisations with common goals about valuing equality and diversity in ECCE. EDeNn supports organisations, trainers and practitioners to work collectively towards the inclusion of an equality and diversity approach in ECCE training and practice. EDeNn was launched at its first seminar in March 2008 by Niall Crowley, CEO of the Equality Authority, with keynote speaker Peter Moss of the University of London. EDeNn's web site will be up and running by end of September 2008.

The 'éist' project is currently promoting an innovative and exciting equality and diversity training course for trainers in ECCE – the first of its kind in the Republic of Ireland. For further information, contact [collette.murray@pavee.ie](mailto:collette.murray@pavee.ie) / [elaine.sheridan@pavee.ie](mailto:elaine.sheridan@pavee.ie) or call (01) 8780255

If you would like to highlight the work of your organisation in our eNewsletter, please email [carys@childrensrights.ie](mailto:carys@childrensrights.ie)

## Social Partnership

As part of the three-year review of the National Social Partnership Agreement, *Towards 2016*, the Children's Rights Alliance participated in a series of bi-lateral meetings with Government departments. The Review, which provides an update on progress towards delivering commitments outlined in *Towards 2016*, invites pillar members to engage Departments on issues of concern.

As a member of the Community and Voluntary Pillar within Social Partnership, our aim is to ensure that commitments in relation to children are honoured and that children's rights are firmly on the agenda of those taking policy decisions at this level.

The bilateral meetings – with the Department of An Taoiseach, the Department of Education and Science, and the Department of Social and Family Affairs – took place in June and July, in the shadow of a bleak economic outlook. Government Departments were careful to stress the budgetary strain they face in delivering on existing commitments. In response, along with other members of the Pillar, we emphasised the importance of protecting the most vulnerable, particularly in harsher economic times. We urged departments not to renege on their commitments to tackle child poverty, to improve child literacy and numeracy, and to deliver on child and adolescent mental health services.

The Review of *Towards 2016* is ongoing, and runs in parallel with the national pay talks. Bilateral meetings with the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, and the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs will take place in September. If you would like any further information, please email [niamh@childrensrights.ie](mailto:niamh@childrensrights.ie)



### News in Brief

The **National Education and Welfare Board (NEWB)** recently published *Guidelines on Developing School Codes of Behaviour*. Downloadable copies are available from their web site, [www.newb.ie](http://www.newb.ie); hard copies are available by calling 01 873 8700

**10 December 2008 will be the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.** The *Every Human Has Rights* campaign, organised by The Elders, who include Nelson Mandela, Graça Machel, Jimmy Carter, Mary Robinson and Aung San Suu Kyi, aims to collect 1bn individual signatures from across the world by the end of 2008. For more information on how to 'do the rights thing', go to: [www.everyhumanhasrights.org](http://www.everyhumanhasrights.org)

**78% of Irish parents support a ban of unhealthy food advertising up to the 9pm watershed** according to a new survey commissioned by the National Heart Alliance. They will shortly launch [www.childrensfoodcampaign.net](http://www.childrensfoodcampaign.net), the Children's Food Campaign web site, which is packed with information and campaign ideas.

The **National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI)** is inviting young people to join its campaign, **Vote @ 16**. For more information and an application form, please go to: [www.nyci.ie/issues/participation/vote\\_at\\_16\\_campaign\\_group](http://www.nyci.ie/issues/participation/vote_at_16_campaign_group)

**Educate Together is calling on its supporters to sign their second-level campaign petition**, which calls on Minister for Education and Science, Seán Haughey TD, to register the organisation as a patron of second-level schools, based on its outstanding track record at primary level. To sign the petition, go to: <http://www.activelink.ie/ce/active.php?id=2094>

**On Friday 12 September the Ark will be holding a working symposium** to build a culture of consultation with children within artistic policy and practice. With limited places, please contact [marketing@ark.ie](mailto:marketing@ark.ie) for more details.



## Listen to Paul's Podcast

In the latest edition of our Children's Rights Podcast Series, Paul Gilligan, former Chief Executive of the ISPC and current Director of St. Patrick's Hospital, takes time to discuss aspects of his recent book, *Keeping Your Child Safe: a Manual for Parents*.

Paul speaks of the increased pressures now facing parents in successfully navigating their child into adulthood. He says: 'I don't think children are any worse off, but I think there are definitely challenges to childhood in the era we live in that are different and need to be tackled if we are to protect our children's childhoods.'

Speaking about a child-centred society, Paul says: 'Ultimately you can't separate children from parents and if you're going to truly create a child-centred society you have to value parents and parenting. The only way to enshrine children as citizens is through a constitutional referendum.'



He continues: 'You can't be a parent without a child and, while that might sound a little bit silly, effectively children's rights are an enhancement in the Constitution and will inevitably strengthen parenting rights and parents' rights. I think very often parents find it difficult to get the support they require and if a constitutional amendment is made, it should ensure that a lot more money is poured into supporting parents and parenting rather than looking to try and remove children from parents or anything so dramatic.'

Paul's podcast and all previous editions are available at iTunes or at [www.childrensrights.ie](http://www.childrensrights.ie), together with transcripts. Our next podcast will feature the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Barry Andrews TD.



## UN News

Following its formal examination of the State in Geneva on 15 July 2008, the Human Rights Committee issued its **Concluding Observations of Ireland's Third Periodic Report under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)** later that month.

Several recommendations related to children, including the improvement of anti-trafficking measures; purpose designed immigration-related detention facilities; amendment of the Immigration, Residency and Protection Bill to outlaw summary removal of asylum seekers; an increase in the availability of non-denominational primary education and the recognition of Travellers as an ethnic minority group. ICCL, FLAC & IPRT submitted a shadow report, which can be found at [www.rightsmonitor.org](http://www.rightsmonitor.org) – a resource download library where a host of UN, Government, NGO and other documents can be found.

The **ICCPR** was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1966 and was ratified by Ireland in 1989. The Covenant, along with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), forms the *International Bill of Human Rights*. Successive human rights instruments have elaborated on the principles contained in the International Bill of Human Rights.

The **Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** entered into force on 3 May 2008, marking a major milestone in the effort to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms of persons with disabilities. To date, Hungary, Slovenia and Spain are the only EU countries to have ratified the Convention. For more information, please go to the following link: <http://www.un.org/disabilities/>

On 18 June 2008, the Human Rights Council adopted the **Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)**, which is expected to get final approval from the UN General Assembly later this year. This protocol will allow individuals to petition the international human rights body about any violations of their economic, social and cultural rights. UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Louise Arbour congratulated the Council on its adoption of an important new human rights instrument. Please go to the following link: <http://www.opicescr-coalition.org/>

## 24 Hour Out-of-Hours Social Work Service

Since late July, the Children's Rights Alliance continues to keep a close eye on the work of the heavily criticised Health Service Executive (HSE), after Gardai were left with no option but to house a 'very vulnerable' 15-year-old boy on a camp bed in a Cork Garda station. We argued that, given the Gardai were concerned enough to keep the boy overnight and had sought social work assistance, somebody should have

been on the other end of the phone.

Echoing the concerns of the Association of Garda Sergeants and Inspectors (AGSI) at the time, we issued statements and spoke to the media about the ways in which the State is failing its most vulnerable children. Calling on the Government to take urgent action, Jillian van Turnhout, Chief Executive, told reporters: 'There is something fundamentally wrong with our society when we have 24-hour emergency access to vets, IT support,

car breakdown assistance and plumbers, but nobody on the other end of the phone when a vulnerable child requires emergency accommodation and support.'

The Alliance strongly believes that the justice and care systems should not be mixed and an alternative safe place must be provided for a child in crisis. Essentially, children in need require the State to operate appropriate systems that work towards their best interests (Article 3 of the UN Convention).

# Mental Health Facilities for Children Vital

In late July, the Children's Rights Alliance called on the Government to stop the historic inaction and chronic under-funding of mental health services for children, following media reports that nearly 200 children were admitted to adult psychiatric units in 2007. We argued that it is wholly unacceptable that children as young as 14 years of age continue to be treated through adult services.

Little progress has been made in service development, despite raising the matter time and again: in our Second Shadow Report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2006, in our role as a designated Social Partner, and most recently during our meetings with the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Barry Andrews TD.

We drew attention to the fact that the Government has failed to deliver on several commitments – including the *Towards 2016* pledge to deliver one child and adolescent community mental health team (CMHT) per 100,000 of the population by 2008. Reacting to the news, the Chief Executive, Jillian van Turnhout, said: 'The lack of child and adolescent mental health services is a serious concern for the Alliance – they are virtually non-existent and we, as a country, should be deeply ashamed.'

## Successful AGM

Our well-attended AGM, held on 13 May at The Alexander Hotel, included the launch of the 2007 Annual Report and the Concise Guide to our Submission to the Joint Committee on the Constitutional Amendment on Children. During the two-hour event, Liam Herrick, Executive Director of the Irish Penal Reform Trust, was elected to the Alliance Board, following the departure of Candy Murphy of One Family. Candy will, however, continue to represent the Alliance on the Labour Market Group of Social Partnership.

The panel discussion, *Whose problem? Why can't our systems cope with our children?*, prompted many interesting and varied contributions from member organisations. The panel comprised **Prof. Mona O'Moore**, Co-ordinator of the Anti-bullying Research and Resource Unit, TCD; **Eddie Ward**, Chief Executive of the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB); **Dr Ann Hope**, School of Social Work and Social Policy, TCD; and **Eddie D'Arcy**, Head of Youth Work Services, Catholic Youth Care, and President of the National Youth Council of Ireland.



Dr. Nóirín Hayes (Chairperson) and Jillian van Turnhout (CEO) at the AGM



Dr. Ann Hope, School of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College, Dublin, addressing the audience

Copies of the 2007 Annual Report and the Concise Guide can be found at [www.childrensrights.ie](http://www.childrensrights.ie)

## !VACANCY!

### Research and Policy Assistant

In order to maintain and develop its active role in policy debate on issues relating to children, the Alliance wishes to expand its current team. We are therefore seeking to recruit a Research and Policy Assistant, for a two year contract:

- This position will involve assisting the Policy Team in researching and developing policies on aspects of children's rights, and in the preparation of submissions, reports and briefing papers. This position will also involve providing administrative support to the Policy Team.
- Candidates will need excellent written communication skills, an ability to analyse information and experience of producing succinct and clear research or policy documents.

The Alliance is funded by, among others, The Atlantic Philanthropies and the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.

For a job description please visit our website: [www.childrensrights.ie](http://www.childrensrights.ie)



A letter of application, along with a CV, should be sent to:

Jillian van Turnhout, Chief Executive, Children's Rights Alliance, 4 Upper Mount Street, Dublin 2 or to [jobs@childrensrights.ie](mailto:jobs@childrensrights.ie)

The deadline for receipt of applications is **Friday, 12 September 2008** at 12 noon.

If you would like to submit material for future eNewsletters, please contact Carys Thomas ([carys@childrensrights.ie](mailto:carys@childrensrights.ie))

Children's Rights Alliance  
4 Upper Mount Street, Dublin 2

Tel: +353 1 6629400  
Fax: +353 1 6629355

Email: [info@childrensrights.ie](mailto:info@childrensrights.ie)  
[www.childrensrights.ie](http://www.childrensrights.ie)