



Rights News

Winter 2008 - 2009

IRELAND'S RIGHTS LANDSCAPE?



Irish Council for
Civil Liberties

About the ICCL

The Irish Council for Civil Liberties (ICCL) is Ireland’s leading independent human rights watchdog, which monitors, educates and campaigns in order to secure full enjoyment of human rights for everyone.

Founded in 1976 by Mary Robinson and others, the ICCL has played a leading role in some of the most successful human rights campaigns in Ireland. These have included establishing an independent Garda Ombudsman Commission, legalising the right to divorce, securing more effective protection of children’s rights, decriminalising homosexuality and the introduction of enhanced equality legislation.

We believe in a society which protects and promotes human rights, justice and equality.

What we do

- We advocate for positive changes in the area of human rights.
- We monitor Government policy and legislation to make sure that it complies with international standards.

Message from the Director

Each year since 1990, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has published a Human Development Index (HDI) which looks beyond a country’s gross domestic product to what UNDP refers to as “a broader definition of well-being”. The HDI measures three dimensions of human development: living a long and healthy life, being educated and having a decent standard of living.

In 2007/2008, UNDP’s HDI for Ireland was 0.959 (out of 1.0), which gives the State a global ranking of fifth out of one hundred and seventy-seven countries. In the midst of deepening gloom about economic recession, it is important to recall that Ireland’s has built a relatively-high capacity to provide for the well-being of those who live here.

However, the HDI is far from being a comprehensive index of human development. It excludes other important indicators such as gender or income inequality and more difficult to measure indicators like respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. Consequently, we need to look beyond this relatively narrow index of human development to understand the likely impact on our collective well-being of the Government’s latest efforts to dismantle Ireland’s human rights and equality infrastructure.

This year’s Budget included savage cuts of 24% to the funding of the Irish Human Rights Commission and 43% to the income of the Equality Authority. If fully implemented, neither body would be able to perform its statutory functions to promote and protect human rights and equality. In the Dáil, Deputies have been treated to the spectacle

of a Minister publicly picking over the budgetary bones of both bodies, and suggesting where further savings might be made in the daily outgoings of independent agencies created to hold him and his Department to account. Almost as an aside, and without any consultation, the Budget effectively abolished the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI) and the Combat Poverty Agency.

In a parallel development, the Government has been staunchly resisting efforts by civil society to restore human rights as an express charitable purpose in the legislation currently passing through the Dáil. The General Scheme of the Charities Bill recognised the advancement of human rights as a purpose “beneficial to the community”; however, by the time the Bill appeared, this had been deleted. At present, notwithstanding sustained efforts by the ICCL (in partnership with, amongst others, Amnesty International Ireland, FLAC, Frontline and the Wheel), it remains the case that animal welfare is recognised as a charitable purpose under the legislation, but human rights is not.

In her recent book, The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism, journalist and author Naomi Klein unmasks a political tendency to use economic upheaval as a coercive pretext to enact ideologically-driven reforms that the public would never normally accept. At the end of 2008, in one of the five most developed countries on earth, our Government appears to have decided that the most vulnerable in our society are to be amongst the primary casualties of the global economic downturn. Ineffectually masked by talk of “culling quangos” and “promoting

- We conduct original research and publish reports on issues as diverse as equal rights for all families, the right to privacy, police reform and judicial accountability.
- We run campaigns to raise public and political awareness of human rights, justice and equality issues.
- We work closely with other key stakeholders in the human rights, justice and equality sectors.

How you can help

You can help us to continue our work to monitor, train, conduct research, campaign and lobby for changes in legislation to ensure our rights are protected and promoted.

Please visit our website, www.iccl.ie, or phone us on 01 799 4504 to make a donation to the ICCL today.

Contact us

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efficiency through shared services” what is actually happening is a sustained and concerted assault on our human rights and equality infrastructure.

Together with over seventy other organisations, the Irish Council for Civil Liberties has formed an Equality and Rights Alliance to actively oppose any diminution in the extent to which our human rights are protected through statute. The Alliance has a website (www.eracampaign.org) which I would encourage you to visit. An online petition will allow you to add your voice to thousands of others calling upon the Government to respect our human rights and fundamental freedoms, both in law and in practice.

In troubled times, it is evident that the need for a genuinely independent human rights body such as the ICCL, which neither seeks nor accepts Government funding, is greater than ever. Your support for our work remains vital, and greatly appreciated.

Mark Kelly
Director

Securing Equality

Guest essayist Dr. Fergus Ryan discusses the General Scheme of the Civil Partnership Bill 2008



Dr.Fergus Ryan

On 18 July 2008, the ICCL held a seminar to discuss the Legal Consequences and Human Rights Implications of the General Scheme of the Civil Partnership Bill.

The papers presented at this seminar will shortly be published in the first volume of an ICCL Seminar Series.

In the essay below, our guest contributor Dr Fergus Ryan presents a digested version of his paper from the Seminar.

The publication of the General Scheme of the Civil Partnership Bill 2008 is a ground-breaking development in the legal treatment of unmarried couples and, in particular, same-sex couples. If ultimately implemented, it will represent a notable departure from the prescriptive tendencies of family law towards a legislative framework that more appropriately reflects the diversity of family life in modern Ireland.

The Scheme as published contains two distinct proposals; a civil partnership scheme for same-sex couples and a cohabitation scheme for both opposite-sex and same-sex couples living together outside of marriage.

The civil partnership scheme is directed at same-sex couples only, creating a form of registered union that is similar (though by no means identical) to marriage. In order to contract a civil partnership, both of the parties must be aged 18 or over and must not be closely related to each other. At the time of the ceremony, neither party may be in a subsisting marriage or civil partnership.

"While the Scheme closely mirrors marriage in many respects, there are some notable differences. In particular, the prerequisites to the dissolution of a civil partnership are easier to satisfy than those applying to marriage."

A civil partnership may be contracted in much the same way as a marriage. In particular, the Scheme proposes that there will be a public ceremony at which the partners will exchange vows before a civil registrar and at least two witnesses. The ceremony may be held in a registry office, though provision is also made for alternative approved venues. Notice requirements will apply, as is the case currently with marriage.

Once the civil partnership is celebrated, the parties will enjoy many, though not all of the rights and responsibilities conferred on married couples. In particular, civil partners will be entitled to seek maintenance (financial support) from each other. Civil partners will also enjoy legal protection on the death of a partner. The surviving partner will have a legal right (regardless of the terms of any will) to claim a portion of the deceased’s estate, and will, furthermore, be protected in cases where a partner dies without making a will. Equality legislation will be amended to prevent discrimination against civil partners. Additionally, the right to seek a barring order will be granted to civil partners, as will the right to sue for wrongful death in respect of a deceased civil partner.

"Far and away the most glaring gap in the Scheme relates to children."

Notably, the provisions of the Family Home Protection Act 1976 will be extended to the ‘shared home’ of civil partners. This will prevent a civil partner from agreeing a unilateral sale, lease or mortgage of the shared home without the prior written consent of the other partner. It will, moreover, be possible to restrain a civil partner who is behaving in a manner calculated to cause the loss of the home, or to make it uninhabitable.

The Scheme provides for the dissolution of the civil partnership, the primary ground being that the parties have lived apart for at least two of the previous three years. Additionally, the court must be satisfied that proper provision has been made for both partners. On dissolution, as is the case currently with divorce, the court may make a series of orders in respect of property, pensions and maintenance, effectively reassigning the various assets of the parties with a view to protecting the respective economic interests of both former partners.

While the Scheme closely mirrors marriage in many respects, there are some notable differences. In particular, the prerequisites to the dissolution of a civil partnership are easier to satisfy than those applying to marriage. Additionally, the remedy of judicial separation (whereby a court may formally declare a couple separated, granting them access to various remedies) will not be extended to civil partners. The Scheme, moreover, makes no mention of taxation and social welfare reform (though this may be dealt with in subsequent finance legislation).

Far and away the most glaring gap in the Scheme relates to children. An increasing number of same-sex partners are choosing to parent children together. Additionally, some same-sex couples already live with children who were conceived in previous relationships. While this issue is undoubtedly complex, the proposed

legislation makes no effort to address the legal position of children in respect of the partners and the responsibilities of the latter. In particular, the partner who is not a biological parent will continue, under the Scheme, to have next to no legal obligations or rights in respect of a child whom he or she is co-parenting.

Although it is the civil partnership scheme that has received the most attention to date, the cohabitation scheme may in practice be of relevance to a much broader constituency. This applies to all cohabitants, that is unrelated cohabiting couples either of the opposite sex or same sex. Unlike the civil partnership scheme, the parties will not need to register their relationship - recognition will be automatic – though they may agree in writing that the redress and succession provisions of the Scheme will not apply to them. The Bill also provides for the recognition of cohabitation agreements.

While all cohabitants will enjoy certain limited rights, particular legal remedies will be extended to a specific category of ‘qualified cohabitants’. In order to be deemed a qualified cohabitant, the couple must have resided together for at least 3 years, though the qualifying period drops to two years where the couple have had children together. If the relationship ends, a qualified cohabitant who is economically dependent will be entitled to apply for various court orders. These include various orders granting maintenance, conferring an interest in property and adjusting pension rights, the overall aim being to provide financial security to the economically dependent partner. A qualified cohabitant will also be allowed, in specific cases, to make a claim from his or her deceased partner’s estate.

"The ICCL's considered view that this Scheme represents a ‘staging post’ rather than a ‘milestone’ is especially apt, though as staging posts go it cannot but be regarded as significant."

Both practically and symbolically, this measure will (if implemented) represent real and substantial progress in the recognition and protection of non-traditional families. This is not to underestimate, however, the drawbacks in the Bill, most notably the apparent reluctance to tackle the rights and responsibilities of same-sex couples who co-parent children. In this regard, the ICCL’s considered view that this Scheme represents a ‘staging post’ rather than a ‘milestone’ is especially apt, though as staging posts go it cannot but be regarded as significant.

Dr. Fergus Ryan is Head of the Department of Law at the Dublin Institute of Technology.

Monitoring Human Rights



70 organisations -
Access Ireland Age Action Age and Opportunity AkidWa Amnesty International Irish section Aontas Banulacht Barnados Carers Association Changing Ireland Children's Rights Alliance Choice Ireland Comhlámh Community Partnership Network Community Platform Community Workers Co-operative Doras Bui Dublin Rape Crisis Centre European Anti-Poverty Network Ireland Family Resource Centres National Forum FLAC GLEN Greater Dublin Independent Living Human Rights Centre, NUIG Immigrant Council of Ireland Inclusion Ireland INOU Integrating Ireland Irish Association of Advocates Irish Congress of Trade Unions Irish Council for Civil Liberties Irish Family Planning Association Irish Nurses Organisation Irish Penal Reform Trust Irish Refugee Council Irish Rural Link Irish Traveller Movement Jesuit Centre for Faith & Justice Kerry Deaf Resource Centre Kilbarrack CDP Labour LGBT LIR Anti Racism Training and Education Programme MarriagEquality Methodist Women of Ireland Migrant Rights Centre Ireland Nasc, the Irish Immigrant Support Centre National Lesbian & Gay Federation National Collective of Community Women's Networks National Traveller Women's Forum National Women's Council of Ireland National Youth Council of Ireland NGO Peace Alliance Nigeria Association Network Ireland (NANI) Northside Community Law Centre Northwest LGBT Pride Older Women's Network One Family OPEN Outhouse Pavee Point People Before Profit Alliance Safe and Legal (in Ireland) Abortion Rights Campaign SIPTU TASC Transgender Equality Network Ireland The Wheel Treoir TUI UCD School of Social Justice Union of Students in Ireland Women's Aid Women Together Network

The Equality and Rights Alliance – Standing up for Ireland’s Human Rights and Equality Infrastructure

Since August 2008 the ICCL has been working closely with the Equality and Rights Alliance to stand up to attacks on the equality and rights infrastructure in Ireland.

The Equality & Rights Alliance (ERA) is a coalition of over 70 civil society groups seeking to ensure the promotion and enhancement

parent Department, this will not be sufficient to enable it to pay its wage bill and carry out any meaningful programme of activities. The Equality Authority will be similarly neutered by the budgetary cut imposed upon it.

The ERA's focus has thus widened, moving from specific opposition to the merger proposals to a focus on upholding and defending the values of human rights and equality in Ireland in the context of a growing number of assaults on these values from Government, at a time when the full protection of equality and rights has never been more important.



Senator David Norris calls time on Minister Ahern outside Leinster House on 11 November

of human rights, equality and social justice in Ireland. It is currently chaired by Dr Joanna McMinn, Director of the National Women’s Council of Ireland.

ERA formed in August in response to the Government’s proposal to merge the Equality Authority, the Equality Tribunal, the National Disability Authority, the Data Protection Commissioner and the Irish Human Rights Commission. The ERA argued that such a move would diminish the ability of these agencies to do the jobs they have been doing well, and that this would potentially affect everyone in Ireland.

The Budget in October put paid to the idea of a merger, instead cutting the budgets of the Irish Human Rights Commission and The Equality Authority by 24% and 43% respectively. These devastating cuts have occurred at the same time that a Charities Bill is passing through the Oireachtas deliberately excluding human rights and equality promotion as a charitable purpose. Although it has been reported that the Human Rights Commission has secured a short-term additional cash injection from its

ERA’s ‘Wake Up!’ and Petition Campaigns

In the wake of the Government’s announcement of devastating cuts to the Irish statutory human rights infrastructure, the ERA launched a nine-day public awareness campaign on 11 November 2008.

Over the nine days running up to the presentation of the Finance Bill in Dáil Éireann on 20 November, the ERA sought to detail the effects on ordinary people of the Government’s moves against Equality and Rights in a mass email campaign. The emails, which were sent to all members of the Oireachtas, and to the ERA’s wide support network, called upon public representatives and the general public to ‘Wake Up’ to the attacks on older people, women, new communities, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities, workers, gay and lesbian people and families. The message was clear: the protection of equality and rights is important to everyone. The emails included case studies of individuals and groups who have benefited from Ireland’s

internationally renowned rights and equality infrastructure.

This campaign was coupled with lively protests outside the Dáil on 19 November and the rollout of a petition calling on the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform to ‘Call Time on Attacks on Equality and Rights’. The protest and petition received the support of many members of the Oireachtas, including Pat Rabbitte TD and Senator David Norris.

Justice Committee Hearing

On 10 December 2008 an ERA delegation, including the Director of the ICCL, will address the Oireachtas Committee on Justice, Equality, Defence and Women’s Rights on these issues.

Human Rights and the Charities Bill 2007

In the past number of months the ICCL has stepped up its work on the Charities Bill 2007 which has been making its way through the Oireachtas since its initiation in October 2007.

Ever since its original submission on the Bill in October 2007, the ICCL has expressed serious concerns that the Bill does not contain an express reference to the advancement or promotion of human rights and social justice, equality or diversity as a “purpose that is of benefit to the community”, and therefore a ‘charitable purpose’.

During the Second, Committee and Report Stages, of the Bill, the ICCL, civil society groups and members of Dáil Éireann have attempted to draw attention to this omission, highlighting the possible detrimental effects that it may have on the work of groups within the NGO sector, and on the ability of future rights and equality-focused charities to achieve charitable status. Further, it has been argued both by the ICCL and by Dáil Deputies that the failure to include the advancement of rights and equality as a charitable purpose sends a damaging message about the State’s commitment to the upholding of human rights and equality. As Deputy Joe Costello said during the Second Stage debate on the Bill on 10 October 2007:

“It is strange that human rights should be excluded. There is surely no better charitable cause or benefit to the community.”

Despite members highlighting this matter in Dáil Éireann the issue was not taken on board by the Minister of State, John Curran TD, and no suitable amendment was made to the Bill during the recently-concluded Report Stage in early November 2008.

Consequently, the ICCL has re-focused its efforts on Seanad Éireann where, together with the Directors of Amnesty International Ireland, FLAC, and Frontline, the ICCL’s Director has been working to raise awareness amongst Senators of the need to recognize human rights as a charitable purpose in the Bill.

As this edition of *Rights News* goes to print, it appears that the Minister will propose further amendments to the Bill, and if they are passed the Bill must return to the Dáil. The ICCL will continue to campaign for statutory recognition of human rights as a charitable purpose and will provide a further update in the next edition of *Rights News*.

In the context of devastating cuts being inflicted on the statutory human rights and equality infrastructure, the role of the NGO and charity sectors in promoting rights and equality has never been more important. To deliberately omit the advancement of human rights and equality as charitable purposes in the Charities Bill sends an alarming message about the Government’s commitment to the upholding of human rights and equality.

ICCL Gives Cautious Welcome to Government Plans on Rendition



At the eleventh hour, on the cusp of the Obama presidency, the Government has realized that the writing is on the wall where its collusion in rendition is concerned

On 1 November 2008 the Government announced plans to call upon the new US administration to respect human rights by ending rendition, closing Guantánamo Bay and ceasing to use torture to interrogate prisoners, and to set up a new Cabinet Sub-Committee on Certain Aspects of International Human Rights headed by the Taoiseach.

"The ICCL welcomes the fact that the Government has finally heeded its call to distance itself from the unlawful practices of the Bush administration."

While the ICCL cautiously welcomed the move, it comes very late in the day, after years of campaigning by the ICCL and others against Ireland’s collusion in rendition.

Further, the Government’s stated commitment to respecting human rights at home and abroad is particularly difficult to square with the devastating budgetary cuts it has meted out to the Human Rights Commission and Equality Authority or the deletion of human rights as a charitable purpose from legislation currently passing through the Oireachtas.

At the eleventh hour, on the cusp of a new Obama Presidency, the Government has realised that the writing is on the wall where its longstanding collusion in rendition is concerned. The ICCL welcomes the fact that the Government has finally heeded its call to distance itself from the unlawful practices of the Bush administration. However, far more action will be needed before the ICCL is convinced that the Government’s renewed interest in the protection of human rights is driven by principle as opposed to political expediency.



Access to Education for Girls Wearing the Hijab

On 23 September 2008 it was reported that the Minister for Education and Science Batt O’Keeffe TD and the Minister for Integration Policy Conor Lenihan TD have jointly agreed recommendations on school uniform policy, including the wearing of the hijab.

While the ICCL welcomed this move, it also expressed disappointment that the recommendations did not provide more guidance to schools on how to exercise their functions under the Equal Status Acts 2000 – 2008.

Our existing equality laws provide an exemption in order to empower schools to maintain their religious “ethos”. However, in the absence of clear legal guidance for principals in this respect, there is a danger that schools may fall foul of their obligations to provide access to education without discrimination under the Acts.

The ICCL is currently preparing a paper on this issue for schools and educational management bodies to educate them on their obligations under human rights and equality law.



Baroness Usha Prashar, Keynote speaker at Judicial Diversity Seminar

A diverse judiciary should be a cornerstone of a modern democracy. The nature of judicial appointments dictates that this is unlikely to happen unless proactive steps are taken to render our current system more inclusive. The ICCL hopes to play its part in ensuring that our future judges are both lawyers of the highest calibre, and more reflective of the rich pool of potential legal talent available in modern Ireland.

Featuring papers by a panel of distinguished figures in the judiciary and legal profession in Ireland and the UK, *Judicial Diversity: Strategies for Change* sought to address several key questions about judicial diversity in Ireland.

The seminar was chaired by the Hon. Mr. Justice Bryan McMahon, High Court Judge and Adjunct Professor to the Faculty of Law, UCC.

The keynote address on judicial diversity in the UK was given by Baroness Usha Prashar CBE, Chair of the United Kingdom’s Judicial Appointments Commission. Other speakers included Professor Kate Malleson of Queen Mary University in London, who discussed the case for positive action to bring about judicial diversity; Dermot Feenan of the University of Ulster, who discussed gender and diversity in the Northern Irish judiciary; and Jennifer Carroll of UCD, who discussed the current judicial appointments system in Ireland.



Prof. Kate Malleson, Baroness Usha Prashar, Dermot Feenan

An Update on ICCL’s Work on Victims’ Rights

In previous editions of *Right News*, we have reported on the ICCL’s ongoing work to promote the human rights of the victims of crime. This work is based on our recent reports *Taking Liberties: The Human Rights Implications of the Balance in the Criminal Law Review Group Report* and *A Better Deal: The Human Rights of Victims in the Criminal Justice System*.

On 13 November 2008, the ICCL appeared before the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Justice, Equality, Defence and Women’s Rights to discuss the *Justice for Victims Initiative* which the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform announced in June 2008. The ICCL stressed the need to deliver real and practical measures to improve matters for the victims of crime rather than focusing on amendments to criminal trial procedures, which appear to form the substance of the Minister’s legislative proposals. The full transcript of the ICCL presentation to the Committee is available here <http://debates.oireachtas.ie/DDebate.aspx?F=JUJ20081113.XML&Ex=All&Page=1>.

In the same month, the ICCL was invited by the European Commission to attend an Experts’ Meeting on Victims in Brussels. The organisation was represented by Deirdre Duffy, its research and policy officer, and the author of *Taking Liberties* and *A Better Deal*. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the implementation of the European Council Framework Decision of 15 March 2001 on the Standing of Victims in Criminal Proceedings. The meeting focused on the challenges posed in implementing the Framework Decision and potential amendments to the text. Remaining well-informed about key developments at European level will assist the ICCL to ensure that its work in Ireland remains grounded in international best practice.

Judicial Diversity - Strategies for Change: ICCL / UCC Seminar

On 18 September 2008, the ICCL and UCC Centre for Criminal Justice and Human Rights held a seminar in the Law Library in Dublin to open up high-level debate and discussion on the future diversity of Ireland’s judiciary.



Justice Frederick Morris

Final Morris Reports Underline need for Improved GSOC Independence and Resourcing

On 7 October 2008, the ICCL welcomed the publication by the Morris Tribunal of its final two reports into complaints concerning some Gardaí of the Donegal Division.

The reports, which winded up the proceedings of the Tribunal after over six years of deliberations emphasised in particular the inadequacy of the framework in which the old Garda Complaints Board was obliged to function.

As Justice Morris put it:

“The system of Gardaí investigating Gardaí, particularly when faced by a ‘blue wall’ of denial from the Gardaí under investigation, was never going to be capable of uncovering the corruption that was endemic in the Donegal division at the time” (see the conclusions of part two of the seventh report)

Ironically, as this latest Morris report is released, the independent Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission (GSOC), set up to replace the Complaints Board, is considering “leasing back” the investigation of complaints to the Garda Commissioner due to a backlog of cases and inadequate funding.

If the events in Donegal uncovered by the Morris reports prove anything, it is that all complaints against the Gardaí must be investigated independently and that in this context, “leaseback” plans constitute a retrograde step in the journey towards a more accountable police force in Ireland. The answer to the Garda Ombudsman’s funding and workload problems is not the erosion of its independence; rather, the onus is on the Government to provide full and adequate funding to the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission to enable it to carry out its investigations effectively and independently.



ICCL Urges Caution on Adoption of Pepper Spray Weapons

On 23 October 2008 Minister for Justice Dermot Ahern TD announced plans for pepper spray weapons to be piloted in operational use by Gardaí.

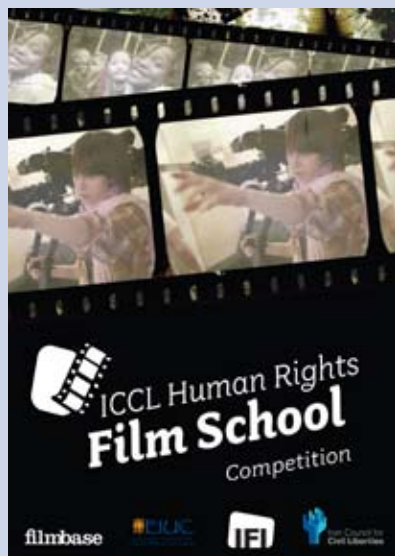
The ICCL has insisted that any Garda issued with such weapons be properly trained in their use, and that the health effects of any such weapons be fully tested prior to their introduction.

Few details on the precise composition of the spray being piloted by the Gardaí, such as its contents or its manufacturer, have thus far been released. However, pepper spray weapons – including their active ingredients and their chemical solvents and propellants – can have damaging short and long-term effects on a number of bodily systems and functions.

Such weapons are particularly dangerous if used against people whose health is impaired or on young people, or when used in conjunction with certain restraining techniques. Just weeks before the Minister’s announcement it was reported that a man died of a heart attack having been pepper sprayed and arrested by police in the city of Regina, Canada; one of a number of deaths connected to pepper spray in North America in the past decade.

While recognising the need of Gardaí to protect themselves and others from physical danger, the ICCL is eager to ensure that all possible measures are taken by An Garda Síochána to avoid the risk of death and injury through the use of such weapons, for the sake both of public safety, and in order to ensure public trust in the force.

Upcoming Events



ICCL Launches Human Rights Film School Competition

The ICCL Human Rights Film School Competition, launches at a reception in the Irish Film Institute at 6pm on 10 December 2008, marking Human Rights day and the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The competition will call upon filmmakers and human rights advocates and activists to submit an original short

film about a human rights-related topic relevant to Ireland. Of the entrants, five will be shortlisted for public screening in late spring/early summer 2009, where the Competition Jury, including directors Jim and Kirstin Sheridan, will announce a winner.

The grand prize of the competition is a place in the Summer school on Cinema and Human Rights organized by the European Inter-University Centre for Human Rights and Democratisation in Venice, including access to the 2009 Venice Film Festival. We will also have assorted runners up prizes, including equipment rental and classes from Filmbase.

Through the Human Rights Film School, the ICCL hopes to demonstrate how the arts and, in particular, the medium of film, can be used to raise public awareness about important human rights issues and, ultimately, to inspire more people to want to make a difference in the world around them.

Full details of the competition, how to apply, and updates about jury members and prizes can be found on the competition's website, www.humanrightsfilmschool.org.

ICCL, FLAC and IPRT plan follow-up to Irish Examination under the ICCPR

Ireland was formally examined under the ICCPR by the UN Human Rights Committee in July 2008 and the Committee issued Concluding Observations in response. The ICCL, FLAC (Free Legal Advice Centres) and the Irish Penal Reform Trust (IPRT) plan to organise follow-up conference on Monday, 30 March 2009 in Croke Park to raise awareness of the Committee's Concluding Observations and to provide a platform for discussing their implementation.

The NGO Shadow Report to the Third Periodic Report of Ireland under the ICCPR, published by FLAC, the ICCL and the IPRT in July 2008, and the subsequent presentation of the report

Michael O'Flaherty



in Geneva during Ireland's examination, was hailed by the UN Human Rights Committee as an exemplary case of shadow reporting by the civil society sector. The March 2009 event represents an important opportunity to follow-up to these proceedings, during which policy makers and civil society groups will reconvene and examine Ireland's efforts to address the issues highlighted in the Shadow Report and reinforced by the UN Human Rights Committee's Concluding Observations.

ICCL Launches New Website



10 December 2008 (International Human Rights Day) will see the launch of the ICCL's brand new website (pictured). The new site will take on a simpler and more user-friendly form than the previous site, and will gather together in an easy-to-find section the ICCL's most popular publications for download. It will also feature an RSS newsreader feed, and a more dynamic homepage from which users can view news updates and quickly download the ICCL's latest newsletter and annual report.

The launch of the site will be the first step towards a planned overhaul by the ICCL of its online presence. During the coming year the ICCL plans to develop a comprehensive searchable online database of all its publications, which will be integrated into this new website, making the important policy and research work of the ICCL more accessible than ever.

Several members of the UN Human Rights Committee will speak at this conference, including: Judge Elisabeth Palm of Sweden (former judge of the Swedish and European Court of Human Rights) and Judge Rajsoomer Lallah (former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court in Mauritius). The Irish member of the Committee, Michael O'Flaherty will also speak about best practice internationally in the adoption of Human Rights Committee's Concluding Observations.

Full information on the date and venue for this event will be made available once finalized on www.rightsmonitor.org, as well on the respective websites of the ICCL, IPRT and FLAC.

The UN Human Rights Committee's website is accessible at: <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrc/index.htm>