

NORTHERN IRELAND WOMEN'S COALITION

STRAND 2 SUBMISSION

RIGHTS AND SAFEGUARDS

The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition wish to see the development of a Culture of Peace across the island of Ireland, and indeed across the regions of the United Kingdom. It believes that while there are many different circumstances pertaining across the regions that comprise this area, and that these circumstances cannot be ignored, that there are still a range of basic individual and collective rights that can transcend these differences.

1. RIGHTS

1.1. The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition aspire to the harmonisation of human rights on a North-South basis. By rights it compasses -

- (1) Individual civil and political rights;
- (2) Individual social and economic rights; and
- (3) A range of collective and communal rights.

The coalition would wish to see any North-South body/ies that may be established as having an important role in the promotion of discussion around the effective achievement of such harmonisation.

1.2. The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition advocates the introduction of a Bill of Rights in Northern Ireland. While recognising the position of Bunreacht na hEireann (the Constitution) in the Republic, the Coalition feels that it is now timely for an extensive discussion to be undertaken in the South about the identification and protection of human rights. The Coalition would hope that any such examination will result in a comprehensive review of the provisions of the current constitution.

1.3. The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition believe that North-South institutional arrangements should specifically address the need to work towards common principles and standards of individual and communal civil, religious, political and socio-economic rights, rooted in concepts of equity and pluralism. Alongside being aware of the need for rights pertaining to the two main traditions on the island, the Coalition places a strong emphasis on the rights of women and of minority ethnic groups.

1.4. The right for the people of Northern Ireland to opt for British and/or Irish citizenship must be protected. The Coalition would seek to see a more active effort made by the Republic of Ireland to include those Northern Irish people - who chose to exercise the right - in a more active Irish citizenship.

1.5. As a preliminary step towards establishing common benchmarks and standards for human rights on a North-South basis, the Coalition would wish to see a coordinated North-South examination of the relevance of the UNESCO Culture of Peace concept for Ireland - both North and South. In essence this concept is based on the encouragement of values, attitudes and behaviour that reinforces non-violence and respect for the fundamental rights and freedoms of every person. It hinges upon the celebration and acceptance of people's rights to be different and their right to a peaceful, secure existence within their communities. The National Culture of Peace Programmes devised by UNESCO are rooted in the belief that -

- * There should be non-violent management of conflicts, based on traditional methods;
 - * There must be a development of democratic procedures and respect for individual political and human rights; and
 - * It is important to ensure the participation and cooperation in the development process of all parties to the conflict, to ensure that the development is sustainable, endogenous and equitable.
- The national programmes are based on a combination of broad-based participation, dialogue and cooperation of all parties to the conflicts in the countries concerned, with specific mention being made of the central role of women to any successful process.

2. SAFEGUARDS

2.1. The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition believes in the importance of monitoring and enforcement of all agreed human rights agenda. To this end the Coalition would argue that any new North-South institutions would be given the task of drawing up a framework for Impact Assessment Statements (IAS) and for monitoring the implementation of such Statements in practice. The remit of these Assessment Statements would be to measure the impact/benefit/difficulties that policies agreed in both, or either, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, might have on people/communities/policies in the other jurisdiction. This would be required not only in relation to those policies that pertain to human rights issues, but should also be extended to all other relevant issues and policies.

2.2. In the event of North-South harmonisation of human rights principles and guarantees being achieved, the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition would envisage the possibility of working towards the establishment of a single Human Rights Court for the whole island, with judicial representation from Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and the European Court or Commission of Human Rights. It is recognised that the delegated powers of such a body would have to be agreed by the legislatures in existence in Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and in Britain. In addition to this, careful consideration would have to be given to the possible impact on existing judicial structures in the respective North and South jurisdictions.

2.3. In the immediate future the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition sees the InterGovernmental Conference as having a remit in relation to issues of rights and justice in Northern Ireland. On the specific issue of possible early release of politically motivated prisoners, the position of such prisoners in Britain and the Republic might be an issue for this body.

2.4. With regard to issues relating specifically to gender equality, the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition feels that it is both possible and desirable to consider such matters on a North-South basis, with adequate support and resources being made available to underpin the necessary coordination. It is felt that any future Commissions on the position of women should be implemented with a North-South geographical remit.