

Equality for the Non-Religious

The treatment of people of no religion in the Constitution, in legislation and by other practices of the State and its agencies.

REJECTED



United Nations
Human Rights

OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

REPORT

REJECTED



UACHTARÁN NA hÉIREANN
PRESIDENT OF IRELAND

28 March 2009

Mr. John Byrne
Humanist Association of Ireland,
Rose Cottage,
Coach Road, Balrothery,
Balbriggan, Co. Dublin, Ireland

REJECTED

Dear John

It is with deep regret that I take this opportunity to inform you that you are not eligible to take the position of President of Ireland as you are a member of the humanist society and are unwilling to take the religious oath to be sworn in.



Humanist
Association
of Ireland

In the 2006 Census,
186,318 people ticked No Religion,
and a further 70,322 people chose to tick
no box under the heading of religion.

The following are extracts from the 93rd session of UN Human Right Committee's report of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. (Geneva, 7 – 25 July 2008).

21. The Committee continues to be concerned that judges are required to take a religious oath. (Art.18)

The State party should amend the constitutional provision requiring a religious oath from judges and to allow for a choice of a non-religious declaration.

22. The Committee notes with concern that the vast majority of Ireland's primary schools are privately run denominational schools that have adopted a religious integrated curriculum thus depriving many parents and children who so wish to have access to secular primary education. (Art. 2, 18, 24, 26)

The State party should increase its efforts to ensure that non-denominational primary education is widely available in all regions of the State party, in view of the increasingly diverse and multi-ethnic composition of the population of the State party.

These are but two examples highlighting the need for constitutional and legal reform which are dealt with more fully in the following pages.

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Constitution, in legislation and by other practices
of the State and its agencies.**



**Humanist Association of Ireland
(HAI)**

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INTRODUCTION

The Humanist Association of Ireland (HAI) is a non-profit company, limited by guarantee and not having a share capital, the aim of which is to promote the ideals and values of Humanism. Humanism is a positive ethical philosophy of life based on concern for humanity in general and for individuals in particular. It is a view of life which combines reason with compassion. It is for those people who base their understanding of existence on the evidence of the natural world and its evolution, and not on belief in a supernatural power.

The HAI is affiliated to the International Humanist and Ethical Union and the European Humanist Federation. It has particularly close relationships with similar organisations in Northern Ireland.

The HAI seeks to promote Humanism through various means including the magazine "Humanism Ireland" which is published by the HAI and the Humanist Association of Northern Ireland, our web site (www.humanism.ie), by holding regular meetings, through a summer school held with sister organisations in Northern Ireland, by hosting an annual Darwin Day lecture, educational visits to schools and through the media. The Association also facilitates those who wish to have a humanist wedding, funeral or child-naming ceremony.

In its relationship with the State the HAI seeks to ensure that State institutions are not biased towards any particular belief group, that differences of belief or philosophy are fully and equitably respected in policy and accommodated in practice by public authorities and that the Constitution, laws and practices of the State reflect this approach.

We hold that the above principles should apply in a truly democratic republic regardless of the size or growth of the various belief groups in the population. We would nevertheless wish to point out that, after the Roman Catholic group, the next largest group in the most recent census (2006) is the group headed "No religion" (186,000). There are a further 70,000 who are 'not stated'.

In addition, Ireland is becoming a much more diverse society ethnically, culturally and in relation to religious and philosophical beliefs. This factor further emphasizes the need for the State to respect diversity in its Constitution, its laws and its practices.





1 THE CONSTITUTION

1.1 Preamble

The preamble to the Constitution reads as follows:

“In the name of the Most Holy Trinity, from Whom is all authority and to Whom, as our final end, all actions both of men and States must be referred,

We, the people of Eire,

Humbly acknowledging all our obligations to our Divine Lord, Jesus Christ, Who sustained our fathers through centuries of trial,

Gratefully remembering their heroic and unremitting struggle to regain the rightful independence of our Nation,

And seeking to promote the common good, with due observance of Prudence, Justice and Charity, so that the dignity and freedom of the individual may be assured, true social order attained, the unity of our country restored, and concord established with other nations,

Do hereby adopt, enact, and give to ourselves this Constitution.”

The constitution ends with the following words:

*“Dochum Gloire De
agus
Onora na hEireann”*

If the Constitution is to be a document to speak for all citizens, its current wording fails that test. Any non-believer would have great difficulty giving allegiance to such a document. Even some Christians would find this language inappropriate in a state document; it is not inclusive even for all religions in that it refers to a Trinitarian Christian deity and is completely unnecessary in a civil constitution of a modern democratic republic.

1.2 Derivation of Powers

Article 6 states that all powers of government, legislative, executive and judicial, derive “under God” from the people. This is another example of non-inclusive wording which is unnecessary in a civil constitution.



1.3 Religious Oaths

Article 12 (section 8) provides that the President, on taking office, make a declaration which opens as follows:

“In the presence of Almighty God I, , do solemnly swear...”

The declaration ends with the words:

“May God direct and sustain me.”

Article 31 (section 4) requires a new member of the Council of State to make a declaration which begins as follows:

“In the presence of Almighty God I, , do solemnly swear...”

Article 34 (section 5) requires every person appointed as a judge to make a declaration which begins with the words:

“In the presence of Almighty God I, , do solemnly swear....”

and ends with the words

“May God direct and sustain me.”

These three articles constitute direct discrimination on the grounds of belief as no non-believer could, with honesty, take up the post of President, member of the Council of State or judge. Consequently, these public positions are denied to a large number of the citizens of the State. Such discrimination should have no place in the constitution of a 21st century democratic republic.

We note that the Human Rights Committee of the UN, in relation to the International Convention of Civil and Political Rights, states that it continues to be concerned that judges are required to take a religious oath. The Committee calls on Ireland to amend the constitutional provision and to allow for a non-religious declaration.

1.4 Blasphemy

Article 40 (section 6) states that

“the publication or utterance of blasphemous... matter is an offence which shall be punishable in accordance with the law.”

In a free society, freedom of expression is one of the most basic and cherished rights and the free exchange of ideas, including criticisms, is a fundamental element in human development. No religious or philosophical beliefs should be protected from vigorous criticism and challenge and religious beliefs should enjoy no extra protection compared with non-religious beliefs.



The HAI made a submission in February 2008 on blasphemy to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on the Constitution. The Committee discussed the issue and we are pleased to note that the Committee recommends, in its report of 10 July 2008, the deletion of the reference to blasphemy from the Constitution.

1.5 State Endorsement of Religion

Article 44 (section 1) states:

“The State acknowledges that the homage of public worship is due to Almighty God. It shall hold His Name in reverence, and shall respect and honour religion.”

This is another example of an unnecessary and offensive provision which renders the constitution one not for all citizens of the State but only for those who believe in a deity.

2 LEGISLATION

General

As a general principle we hold, in the context of the increasingly diverse nature of Irish society, that draft legislation should be proofed for its potential effects on minorities, including the non-religious sector, along the lines of existing proofing for effects on women and on poverty. Where proposed legislation is likely to cause difficulties or hardship for a minority there should be consultation with relevant organisations.

2.1 Equal Status Act 2000

Section 7 of this Act allows primary and post-primary schools to discriminate on religious grounds in their admissions policy in certain circumstances such as the religion of the applying student. The reality for many families is one of lack of choice of school in their locality and many are effectively forced to send their children to schools of a particular religious denomination whose ethos is not in conformity with their own. In the absence of an adequate network of alternative schools, either non-denominational or neutral as regards beliefs, this allowance of discrimination is unfair and should be repealed.

2.2 Employment Equality Act 1998

Section 12 of this Act allows training colleges for primary teachers to discriminate in their admissions policy on religious grounds. The training colleges in question supply teachers for the entire primary school community including children of particular denominations, children of no religion in denominational schools (due to lack of choice) and children in multi-denominational schools. Accordingly, this permitted discrimination is an unacceptable departure from normal equality standards.

Section 37 of the same Act allows hospitals and schools to discriminate on the grounds of religion in employment. Again, the difficulty is that such institutions, because of the common lack of an alternative in the locality, are providing what, in many countries, would be normal state services to the whole community and not just to the members of a particular religious denomination. For this reason normal equality standards should apply and the section be repealed.

2.3 Civil Registration Act 2004

In March 2003, the Association wrote to the secretary of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Marriage Law Reform making the case that those getting married should have a choice of celebrant who reflects their own belief system.

In May of that year the secretary of the Committee wrote to say that the Committee was recommending that the proposals for reform outlined in various discussion papers be included in the forthcoming Civil Registration Bill. Paper No. 4 stated that the proposed future approach would extend the power to solemnise marriage to recognized solemnisers of groups in society not adequately catered for by the present system.



The Bill was published in July 2003. To our surprise and disappointment the provision concerning recognised solemnisers was confined to religions only. This is now reflected in the Act. We have been told that this outcome arose because of drafting difficulties. The end result for us is that non-religious citizens who wish to have a Humanist marriage ceremony conducted by a Humanist celebrant (for which there is a growing demand) must also undertake a civil marriage ceremony conducted by a State registrar. This is a discrimination against those who do not belong to a religion despite the opportunity presented by the recent reform of the legislation.

The Association asks that this legislation be amended and has no doubt that, if the political will exists to remove the discrimination, any drafting difficulties will be surmounted. The HAI notes that in Scotland, as a result of UK implementation of the European Convention on Human Rights, celebrants from the Humanist Society of Scotland have been authorised to perform fully legal weddings. Ireland is also a signatory of the Convention.

2.4 Charities Act 2009

In the context of the Dialogue process with the Government, where we were assured of parity of esteem with religions, we were disappointed that the draft legislation did not give equality to Humanism as a belief system in the definition of charitable purposes with religions. Proposed amendments by the Labour Party which would have given such equality for the advancement of religion and the advancement of non-religious philosophical life stances or alternatively simply to Humanism were rejected by the Government. This was the first opportunity, since the Dialogue process started, for the promised parity of treatment to be delivered in legislative terms.

2.5 Tax Exemption Arising from Charitable Status

We have a similar concern in relation to the interpretation of tax legislation. In tax law there is no definition of the term "charity". Arising from a 19th century court judgment four categories of charity are accepted. One of these categories covers "the advancement of religion". The Revenue Commissioners have stated that the Courts have so interpreted the term religion so as to exclude an organization which, for example, is formed for the advancement of atheism. However, if equality of treatment with such organizations is to be achieved in accordance with 21st century principles, it appears to us that the Commissioners should interpret the law so as to provide a fifth category, namely one to cover organizations formed for the advancement of non-religious life stances. The issue is a fundamental one of equality of treatment of citizens and we are sceptical that any Court would restrict the Commissioners to the present scope.

2.6 Electoral Act

Under Section 111, concerning the right to vote, a returning officer or presiding officer may, in certain circumstances, administer an oath or affirmation to establish the identity of the person wishing to vote. An affirmation is only available to someone who states that he has no religious belief or that the taking of an oath is contrary to his religious belief. No citizen should have to make any statement to any state official about his or her religious belief. It is not the State's business. The law should be amended to provide simply for the alternative forms of declaration and leave the choice to the prospective voter or, alternatively, provide for a single declaration which is neutral and secular in nature.



2.7 Defamation Act 1961

Section 13 of this act provides for the offence of blasphemous or obscene libel. We note that the Defamation Bill 2006, as passed by the Senate, proposes to repeal the 1961 Act and the new bill contains no blasphemy provision. We welcome this development.

2.8 Other Legislation

When legislation is being updated or reformed the HAI request that inappropriate provisions favouring religion should be removed so as to make the legislation neutral with respect to religious and non-religious citizens.



General

Notwithstanding the desired proper neutrality of the Constitution and laws of the State in matters of religion, it is of equal importance that the State shows equal respect in its practices and in the implementation of its policies. There are a considerable number of instances where such parity of esteem is not demonstrated. They range from the careless disregard of State institutions in the area of symbols or ceremonies to serious examples of discrimination fundamentally affecting the lives of those of no religion. The following are examples of such discrimination:

3.1 State Ceremonies

Attendance at formal ceremonies, such as the inauguration of a President, are normally confined, as regards leading roles, to representatives of the main religions. More inclusive arrangements need to be made if such ceremonies are to engage all citizens by giving a similar role to representatives of the non-religious community. The HAI welcomes the assurance of the Department of the Taoiseach that it will be invited to representative attendance at future National Days of Commemoration. The Association seeks such attendance at other State events where there is representative attendance by faith-based communities.

3.2 Dáil and Senate Prayers

At the commencement of each sitting of the Dáil or Senate a prayer is read. The prayer is clearly a Christian one. Such exclusivity is incompatible with a parliament of a 21st century republic with a citizenship base which is diverse in its beliefs and belief systems. A neutral opening ceremony should replace the existing practice.

3.3 Courts Service - Oaths

Where a juror or witness is to be sworn-in, a Christian Bible is offered and essentially a person who does not wish to swear on such a book has to opt out by, for example, offering to make an affirmation instead. This is not a neutral approach to citizens. One should only be asked which of an all-inclusive list of options one wishes to avail of without any one approach being treated as the norm. Alternatively, a common neutral formula should be adopted.

3.4 Polling Stations

Many polling stations are situated in denominational, particularly Catholic, schools or other church-owned property rather than in civic buildings. Voters have often to cast their vote in an environment containing much religious imagery. Sometimes the voting concerns issues on which the particular church, which is the patron of the school, has taken a strong view. Neutral venues for voting should be provided at all times.

3.5 Use of State Property for Religious Purposes

Dublin Castle is one of the symbolic centres of the State and a venue for important State ceremonies such as Presidential inaugurations, State receptions and other major public events involving both citizens and visitors of various religions and none. The Chapel Royal is part of the property and although no longer functioning as a church it is used to ring the angelus every day. It is inappropriate that, in a modern republic, a Government agency be providing services of a religious nature by using a State-owned and maintained building (and particularly such a prominent one) to summon to prayer the adherents of a particular religion. Equally, it is inappropriate for religious monuments, such as the papal cross in the Phoenix Park, to be erected on public property or for public buildings such as post-offices to be used for the collection of money for religious purposes.

3.5a State Broadcasting Company

RTÉ as a national service should cater for all citizens in its religious and philosophical programming. The Humanist/non-religious perspective should be given broadcasting time on a par with the weight of the non-religious community in society.

3.5b Burial Rights

Legislation should be passed ensuring that all local authority areas of the republic provide a municipal burial facility for the non-religious community

3.6 Choice of Primary School

The reality for parents in most parts of the State is that they have no choice but to send their children to a primary school under the patronage of a particular church, usually the Catholic Church. This is regardless of the fact that the parents concerned may belong to a minority religion which does not have a school in the locality or belong to no religion. This situation is supported by the taxpayers of all religions and none. Yet the number of multi-denominational schools, while rising rapidly, is tiny compared to the number of denominational schools and to the size of the population of those who would otherwise prefer to avail of a multi- or non-denominational alternative. We note the repeated negative comments by UN human rights bodies on the scandalous lack of choice in the Irish educational system. We note particularly the observations of the UN Human Rights Committee (July 2008) in relation to the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights. The Committee observed that Ireland should increase its efforts to ensure that non-denominational primary education is widely available in all regions.

Governments have replied to this obvious discrimination by stating that any group of parents can set up a school and get generous State support. However, it is extremely demanding of time, money and other resources for parents to set up a school on their own initiative and it is particularly difficult in areas of relatively low income. Where else in the developed world is it left to the initiatives of parents to set up a school that reflects their beliefs or is at least neutral in this regard? It is a reasonable demand that a modern State should provide at least a primary education system that is either secular or neutral. Such provision would not preclude the setting up of schools by religious bodies to meet the needs of their belief groups. We believe it to be a reasonable goal that the State should at least embark on a plan to gradually provide a network of state schools which are neutral in respect of all citizens.



In the meantime, the organisation that facilitates parent groups in setting up multi-denominational schools, Educate Together (ET), has expressed concern that the minimal State support for its administration costs could cause the organization to severely reduce its services. We support its efforts to obtain adequate State funding to continue its very necessary work, work which, in a modern democratic State, would normally be carried out by the state itself, i.e. the direct provision of a network of primary schools which are neutral as between children from different belief systems. We also support ET in its efforts to secure a commitment to no longer subject new schools to a period of occupation of temporary premises. The provision of purpose-built schools at least for primary education is surely a very basic element of a modern state, particularly a developed one like Ireland.

The HAI notes with interest the pilot scheme for VEC community primary schools. We have, however, serious reservations of principle concerning the separation of pupils during the school day for the purposes of providing religious instruction. We are sceptical also about the practical logistical aspects of this given the number of potential different groups involved. We seek assurances that the ethos of schools set up on this model will be neutral, in principle and in practice, as between those belonging to different religions and of those of no religion. The HAI welcomes its nomination to membership of the Religious Reference Group set up in relation to the new schools.

3.7 Choice of Secondary School

We are also concerned with the lack of choice at secondary level. This sector is dominated by private religion-based schools supported extensively by the taxpayer. Even the VEC-controlled community colleges have in some cases, we understand, agreements making them subject to a particular religious ethos with some schools board members being appointed by denominational authorities. As a first step, the HAI requests that the Department of Education and Science provide a list of all secondary schools stating, where applicable, the religious denomination or ethos, with details of the basis for that ethos (e.g. ownership, deed of trust, agreement with a particular church body etc).

3.8 Rights of Minorities in Schools

There is also the issue of how to accommodate and respect children in a school (including children from Humanist families) where they do not belong to the ethos of the school patron. A situation where the ethos of the school permeates the whole school day and where religion is integrated with other subjects, amounts to a degree of indoctrination and is an intrusion on the human rights of such children. Equally, the timing of religious instruction should make it a practical rather than an abstract right for families to opt out of that part of the curriculum, for example by scheduling such sessions for the end of the school day. In practice, the opt-out clause from such instruction is unworkable for parents as it presents a huge dilemma involving the singling out their children for unwanted attention. The State, which gives massive support to the denominational sectors, should ensure that structures are in place to protect the rights of children who do not belong to the denominations involved.

3.9 Primary Teacher Training

Despite the increasingly diverse society, in terms of religious or philosophical belief, the only route available in the State, in terms of normal attendance at a college, for an individual seeking qualification as a primary teacher is through a course taken at a college owned by a religious denomination. This is another clear example of the discriminatory environment that exists in the educational sector. We consider that the State needs to address this gap in provision by providing a complementary alternative. We welcome the proposal by the Department of Education and Science to fund a pilot programme to develop modules for training teachers to deliver the Educate Together “Learn Together” programme.

3.10 State Support of School Chaplains

The High Court declared that the payment of chaplains in VEC schools by the State is not unconstitutional. However, there is a serious issue as to whether, particularly in a society with people of many belief systems, such support is equitable and appropriate. Such funding is heavily biased towards the large religious groups to the exclusion of others. It is not clear how equality of treatment can be given to smaller groups. In this context and also on the basis that religious counseling is not an area where the State should be involved, the HAI considers that such support should be withdrawn.

3.11 Religious Education Curriculum

We support the provision of a genuine religious curriculum which is concerned with learning about religions and alternatives to religion. We are concerned, however, about reports that, in some cases, the curriculum is being used for religious indoctrination. The NCCA should be asked to restructure the religious education curriculum to ensure that students spend an adequate proportion of class time studying religions and philosophies other than their own. Furthermore, it is noted that neither the non-religious community nor the multi-denominational educational sector is represented on the NCCA. Fairness and balance require that this be rectified. It is particularly important that there be representation in relation to the design of the religious education curriculum to ensure that it treats all religions and non-religious life stances in an appropriate and balanced manner.

3.12 Provision of and Support for Hospitals

As part of its new approach to the centralization of hospital services to achieve critical mass for quality of service we note that the State, in some cases, is selecting religious-run hospitals as the key hospitals in certain regions. For example, the main hospital for the South East of the Dublin area is to be St Vincent’s Hospital. Huge amounts of taxpayers’ money have been and will be expended on such hospitals but without democratic control. This is an extraordinary policy for a society that is becoming more diverse in terms of belief and it will be the source of conflict in the future just as the denominational takeover of primary schools has left a legacy totally unsuited to the present societal mixes of issues. Those related to reproductive medicine and end-of-life matters, will continue to arise with the interests of the patient, including the non-Catholic patient, being in conflict with, and not respected by, the powerful ethics committees of such hospitals. What confidence can taxpayers who do not subscribe to the particular religion have in such a system? We welcome the assurances by the Department of Health and Children that the new National Children’s Hospital will be a State hospital neutral in its ethos.



3.13 Rights of Non-Religious Hospital Patients

At present, in religious-run and State hospitals patients are asked on admission to identify their religion. It is not clear what use is made of the data. Also, the question is not an open question such as "Have you a religion? If so, please state it." The question can be embarrassing for some who consider the matter to be a private one. A more appropriate question would be on the lines of "Do you wish to avail of religious chaplaincy services during your stay?" Alternatively, a question on the following lines could be asked: "Do you wish to express a religious identity?"

Whatever data in this area is collected should be capable of being transferred to the various chaplaincy services on a targeted basis. In practice, our members are regularly confronted with unsolicited visits and services of mostly Catholic chaplains and their support staff. These appear to operate on a default principle that assumes that a patient is Catholic unless the person opts out each time encountered. This requires non-religious patients who may be ill, under stress, under medication, vulnerable and maybe dying, to have to decline such services, sometimes on a daily basis. This is often in the presence of other patients or medical staff. This is an unacceptable burden on patients, an intrusion on privacy and a denial of human rights.

The HAI welcomes the assurances by the HSE that it is committed to the fostering of respect for the diverse needs of patients and that a Patients' Charter is a part of its National Strategy for Service Users. We also welcome the development of an intercultural guide in matters of death and bereavement on which we were consulted.

The Association remains concerned, however, with the present reality on the ground in relation to non-religious patients.

3.14 Ethics in Denominational Hospitals

Given the present reality that non-religious patients and patients of minority religions are treated in publicly-funded Catholic hospitals, the HAI is concerned that the rights of patients who do not subscribe to the ethics of the Catholic Church be protected in areas such as reproductive medicine and that such protection be guaranteed by the State which represents all taxpayers and citizens.

3.15 Symbols in Hospitals

Given the situation where non-religious people are, in practice, often required to be patients in State-funded religious hospitals, there is a need for a code, to be supervised by the Department of Health, to eliminate the use of religious symbols in public areas or wards. At a very minimum no one should be confronted directly in their hospital room or ward with symbols which can be highly offensive to non-adherents of that religion. Individuals confronted with such a situation are often already in a very distressed state and indeed may be dying. Such persons are generally too weak or vulnerable to object to such intrusion.

3.16 Overseas Development Assistance

The HAI has made a submission in response to the Government's White Paper on Ireland's official programme of Overseas Development Assistance. We take the opportunity to reiterate our concerns that taxpayers' money be used for aid that has as a single objective - the betterment of the recipients' material welfare. We accordingly oppose the channeling of such money through organisations which have other prime objectives, including religious ones. There are and can be conflicts between religious and development objectives as in the case of the promotion of the availability of certain contraceptives as one of the means of combating AIDS. It is possible to distribute aid through organisations which are solely humanitarian in purpose and which do not have agendas based on promoting religious beliefs or conversion.

3.17 Census of Population

The HAI is concerned with the existing wording of the population census in respect of religious identity. The question "What is your religion?" is not an open neutral question even allowing for the fact that one reply option is "No religion". (The absence of religion cannot be a religion.) The association is aware of anecdotal evidence that some people of no religion skip the religion question for the above reasons and as are counted in the category of "Not stated". We have proposed changes which will, we believe, reduce the size of the "not stated" category and will thus give a more accurate result, and we are seeking support for such changes.

3.18 Prison Chaplains

The payment of prison chaplains by the State raises issues of equality of treatment. Humanist chaplains are paid in some other countries. The issue should be examined to ensure that there is equality of service of provision.

3.19 Use of State Employees for Religious Purposes

It is extremely inappropriate for public servants, acting as such, to participate in religious ceremonies or events outside their normal duties such as to provide a military escort for religious processions.

Equally, where employees are involved in ceremonies within their department, military unit etc it is essential that such events are designed to be inclusive and violate no-one's rights.





3.20 State Observance of Religious Festivals

It is reasonable and efficient for the State to take major religious festivals into account by instituting public holidays or by facilitating the taking of leave by its officials. However, the HAI considers it to be inappropriate for a state which should be neutral between those of different beliefs to actively celebrate the religious element of such festivals by, for example, the issue of postage stamps or official Christmas cards of a religious nature.

3.21 Other State Practices

There are other areas where religion has been allowed to encroach on the civil sphere or where the State has inappropriately entered the religious area. If the principle of neutrality is adopted a number of such practices should be reviewed and amended.

CONCLUSIONS

The HAI values and respects the democratic climate enjoyed by the citizens of the State. We aim to improve the quality of that climate and ensure that it is enjoyed by all. We have demonstrated, however, that the State does discriminate against people of no religion both directly and indirectly in significant areas of life. This has the effect of marginalising many citizens. The picture we paint is of a State which is lacking in regard to fully protecting our rights. We look forward to working with State institutions with a view to addressing the various deficiencies that we have identified. The test for success is whether a person of no religion can feel himself or herself to be a full citizen of the Irish state and not feel alienated as a second-class citizen because of an absence of religious belief.



CONTACT DETAILS

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