



AN COIMISIÚN UM CHEARTA AN DUINE
IRISH HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

IHRC Annual Report 2011 Launch

25 June 2012

Introduction by Des Hogan, Acting Chief Executive

Check Against Delivery

Minister, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, you are all very welcome here today to this, the 2011 Annual Report launch of the Irish Human Rights Commission. The order of speakers this afternoon will be the IHRC President Dr Maurice Manning who will be followed by Minister Shatter and Judge Donal Barrington, the first President of the Commission.

Before introducing the President, I wanted to take the opportunity to note just a few of the highlights of the Annual Report for 2011.

The number of communications we received from members of the public continued to increase this year, and was up almost 15% from 2010. As a result of these communications we provided legal representation in a number of cases to individuals in vulnerable situations such as the summary eviction by a local authority of a tenant with an intellectual disability.

As we had no funds we continued to partly prepare our *amicus curiae* submissions to the Courts in-house using our two solicitors and we also availed of *pro bono* assistance from the Bar before the High Court in a number of cases. Those cases saw legislation being struck down as unconstitutional and a prohibition placed on an unfair trial where a person

faced a higher sentence because of his intellectual disability and inability to plead guilty in the District Court. We also intervened before the European Court of Human Rights in a number of cases both ourselves and on behalf of the European Group of National Human Rights Institutions, whose Legal Working Group we continue to chair.

Our casework was also the catalyst for some substantive policy responses. Thus following a wide consultation we published our report *Religion and Education: A Human Rights Perspective* recommending increased diversity of school type in the State and ensuring that no proselytism or indoctrination of pupils can take place. Our Report fed into the deliberations of the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism. We also followed up on our report on the Magdalene laundries and await the report of Senator McAleese with interest.

We saw a busy year in our research and policy work. In June, with the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission we presented our advice on a Charter of Rights for the island of Ireland to the UK and Irish Governments. We engaged in the first comprehensive review of Ireland's human rights record before the UN Human Rights Council – the Universal Periodic Review, as well as with the UN committees Against Torture and for Combating Racism, providing our independent views on Ireland's human rights record. At the national level, we continued to roll out our Human Rights Education and Training Project for Civil and Public Servants through which we have trained almost 500 Civil and Public Servants to date, and distributed over 7,000 copies of our Human Rights Guide. We also published a major report on human rights education in Ireland and proposed a National Action Plan on the topic. We continued to provide our observations to Government on draft legislation where we had capacity to do so.

I would like to conclude my remarks by paying tribute to the Commission's Chief Executive from 2007 to early 2012, Mr Éamonn Mac Aodha, who has since been appointed Ambassador to Belgium, to the President who has courageously led the Commission during these years, to Commissioners for their support and guidance. Inevitably it falls to me to thank our hard working staff and contractors who continue to work with little resources but whose motivation stems from a fundamental belief in our

mission: working to ensure the protection and promotion of human rights of all people in Ireland.

Thank you.