

**Speaking Notes for Ambassador Gerard Corr**  
**Adoption of the Outcome of Ireland's UPR Report and**  
**Addendum**  
**at the 19<sup>th</sup> Plenary Session of the Human Rights Council**

**Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> March 2012**

Thank you very much, Madame President.

I am delighted to be here today and it is a great honour to address the Council on the occasion of the consideration and adoption of the outcome of Ireland's first Universal Periodic Review.

The UPR process is an important one in raising awareness of and standards in relation to human rights on a global level, and we are extremely grateful to everybody whose participation helped to make the process so meaningful and constructive for us. I would like to express our sincere appreciation to the delegations of other member states that commented and made recommendations in advance of and during Ireland's interactive dialogue on October 6<sup>th</sup> last year and also to the troika of Bangladesh, Italy and Moldova.

We are also keen to express our gratitude to Irish civil society and the non-governmental organisations who engaged so thoroughly with us to raise awareness of the UPR mechanism in general. I believe that the excellent working relationship established during this first UPR cycle will continue to be a most positive and constructive element as we all work towards our common goal of striving to improve human rights in Ireland.

One of the great strengths of the UPR, in our experience, is the particular emphasis on consultation that is so central to the process. As part of our preparation for the National Report, we held a series of public consultation meetings around the country and were delighted with the level of engagement from members of the public. So many people gave up their time to come to

our meetings and highlight human rights issues of concern to them. Others went to great effort to send us submissions on human rights issues. The value of such participation cannot be emphasised enough.

Every point raised in meetings and submissions was noted and discussed, and helped to inform both our National Report and our interactive dialogue. We look forward to building on this experience as we work to fulfill the commitments we have made and continue to strengthen Ireland's human rights record and infrastructure between now and our review in the next UPR cycle.

Our national human rights institution, the Human Rights Commission, played a significant part in informing the public about the importance and value of the UPR process by holding their own information sessions across the country and offering advice and guidance to people who wished to make submissions. Along with representatives from NGOs, they supported our consultation process by providing independent speakers to take part in our public meetings last year. Their tireless work was vital to the success of Ireland's UPR experience.

As we are all aware, the protection and promotion of human rights requires continuous review and updating. As society evolves, so must our response to the challenges and dangers to fundamental rights and freedoms. In Ireland, our Constitution provides a strong foundation for the protection of human rights, both those specified in the Constitution and derived from its underlying principles. We also have a strong legislative framework to further protect individuals from discrimination, inequality and unjust treatment.

As our Minister for Justice, Equality and Defence stated in our interactive dialogue, the Government announced its decision last September to improve Ireland's human rights infrastructure by merging the Irish Human Rights Commission and the Equality Authority into a new Human Rights and Equality Commission in order to promote human rights and equality issues in a more effective, efficient and cohesive way. A Working Group comprised of an

independent Chair, members of both existing bodies, and officials from the Department of Justice and Equality, held a consultation process to seek the views of civil society and members of the public on what the new body should do, what features and functions it should have, how it should be structured and what working methods it should employ. The Working Group also benefitted from a most informative meeting with the Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, Kyung-wha Kang.

I am very pleased to report that the Working Group have nearly completed their Report, which will be presented to Government shortly. We anticipate that the new Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission will build on the achievements of the current bodies, and will help us to forge an even stronger culture of human rights awareness and protection in Ireland.

Of the one hundred and twenty seven recommendations made by member states at our review last October, Ireland immediately accepted sixty two, was unable to support fifteen, and undertook to further examine fifty. After careful consideration by our Interdepartmental Working Group on the UPR, comprising representatives from all relevant Government Departments, we responded to these fifty outstanding recommendations in our Addendum to the Report of the Working Group.

Of the fifty pending recommendations, Ireland fully accepts twenty nine recommendations, partially accepts a further seventeen, and is unable to support only four. In the Addendum, we have given a concise explanation as to our response to each individual recommendation. This means that of a total of 127 recommendations, Ireland fully accepted 91. A further 17 were accepted in part.

The most important phase of this entire process is, of course, the implementation of the commitments we have made. We consider some recommendations to have already been implemented, while other areas of implementation are underway, as indicated by the Minister for Justice, Equality and Defence at our review in October.

For example, at the interactive dialogue, many states raised the question of prison accommodation, in particular, overcrowding and in-cell sanitation<sup>1</sup>. Last week, on March 6<sup>th</sup>, Minister Shatter visited Mountjoy Prison in Dublin to inspect the recently refurbished C Division, which is due to re-open this month. The project was extremely complex and the refurbished accommodation will provide radically improved physical conditions for prisoners, including a 28-cell dedicated committal/assessment area for new prisoners as recommended by the Inspector of Prisons in his 2009 report and a new dedicated Drug-Free Area, which has been introduced as part of the enhancement of drug treatment services in all closed prisons. This will support any prisoner who is drug free, has illicit drug free status and/or is stable on methadone and the Prison Service intends that by the end of 2012 all closed prisons will operate dedicated Drug Free Areas.

The refurbishment project has also seen the introduction of in-cell sanitation in all cells on the C Division, and a similar refurbishment project will commence on the B Division within the next few weeks, which, when completed, will see in-cell sanitation installed in all cells on the B Wing. This will result in 317 cells in Mountjoy prison having in-cell sanitation, almost 60% of the total prison, by the end of this year. The developments in Mountjoy and the implementation of the proposals for Cork prison, which were announced in just the last few days by the Minister, are the realisation of the Government's commitment as indicated at our review in October.

Also last week, the Government announced our decision to sign the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the formal signature by Ireland will take place in the coming weeks at the United Nations Headquarters in New York. Our current Programme for Government clearly states our goal of forging a new Ireland based on fairness and equality. The complaints mechanism that will be

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<sup>1</sup> For information – the question of prison accommodation was raised by Norway, Austria, Timor-Leste, Switzerland, Hungary, United Kingdom, Denmark, Sweden, USA, Algeria, Thailand, Uzbekistan, Iran, Spain, Peru, Indonesia and the Netherlands.

established by the Optional Protocol to the ICESCR is in keeping with the spirit of the many independent complaints, monitoring and inspection bodies that are currently in place in Ireland. Signing this Optional Protocol gives us the opportunity to continue to affirm our determination to achieve full respect for human rights in practice.

Work is continuing on making Ireland a fairer country in which to live. Proposed wording for a referendum on children's rights is currently being finalised, with a view to holding the referendum later this year. The question of transparency and anti-corruption legislation was raised during our consultation process, and I am pleased to report that the Government recently published the Draft Heads of the Protected Disclosure in the Public Interest Bill 2012, which will provide a single, overarching framework protecting whistleblowers in all sectors. We remain committed to tackling social inequality in our society, and in the budget for 2012, we have protected primary weekly social welfare payment rates and many other forms of social assistance to the most vulnerable in Irish society.

It is particularly important to us that in the years leading up to our next review, the momentum that we and all stakeholders set in train for the first UPR cycle is not lost. For this reason, we have chosen to prepare and submit a voluntary interim report on Ireland's progress in implementing our commitments. This process will help all parties involved to keep track of what has been completed, what is ongoing and what still needs to be done, and should help to avoid particular issues slipping between the cracks and being eclipsed by whichever other pressing questions are the main focus of public attention at the time. As mentioned in our National Report, Ireland's commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights is an underlying principle of our policy in all spheres. We look forward to working together with civil society, NGOs, individuals and any interested parties, to realise our common goals and human rights aspirations.

Thank you, Madame. President.

