

# Atheist Ireland

## Recommendations for Session 14 of OSCE/ODIHR Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 30 September 2015



To: The Secretariat, HDIM, OSCE

Here are Atheist Ireland's recommendations for Session 14 of the 2015 HDIM for the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the Irish State, other OSCE States, and Non-Governmental Organisations.

These recommendations also apply to Session 15, in which we also participated.

### **A - Overall Recommendations for Session 14**

1. Host an event to combat specifically discrimination against atheists
2. Appoint an official to report specifically on discrimination against atheists
3. Support Dublin Declaration on Secularism and the Place of Religion in Public Life
4. Support Dublin Declaration on Empowering Women Through Secularism
5. Change relations of OSCE and States with the Holy See/Catholic Church

### **B - Recommendations related to Ireland for Session 14**

6. Constitutional amendments regarding freedom of religion or belief in Ireland
7. End religious discrimination in the Irish education system
8. Amend the Civil Registration Act in Ireland to treat atheists equally
9. Vindicate the reproductive rights of women in Ireland
10. Redress for historic abuse of women and children in Ireland
11. Implement conclusions on freedom of religion of UN Human Rights Committee
12. Implement conclusions on the right to education of UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights 2015, UN Human Rights Committee under ICCPR 2014, European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance 2013, UN Committee on Elimination of Racial Discrimination 2011, UN Human Rights Committee under ICCPR 2008, Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities 2006, UN Committee on the Rights of the Child 2006, and UN Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination 2005.

### **C - Supporting Documents**

13. Schools Equality PACT - Patronage, Access, Curriculum, Teaching
14. Dublin Declaration on Secularism and the Place of Religion in Public Life
15. Dublin Declaration on Empowering Women Through Secularism

Yours sincerely,

Michael Nugent, Chairperson  
Jane Donnelly, Human Rights Officer  
Atheist Ireland

## **A - Overall Recommendations for Session 14**

### **1. Host an event to combat specifically discrimination against atheists**

OSCE/ODIHR to host an event to specifically quantify and combat discrimination against atheists, similar to the events held to specifically combat discrimination against Christians, Muslims and Jews. This is our fifth year making this request.

### **2. Appoint an official to report specifically on discrimination against atheists**

OSCE/ODIHR to appoint an official to examine and report specifically on discrimination against atheists, including contacting advocacy groups for atheists who are victims of discrimination.

### **3. Support Dublin Declaration on Secularism and the Place of Religion in Public Life**

OSCE/ODIHR and all states and NGOs to support the attached recommendations in the Dublin Declaration on Secularism and the Place of Religion and Public Life, put together by atheist advocates internationally at a conference in Dublin in 2011.

### **4. Support Dublin Declaration on empowering Women Through Secularism**

OSCE/ODIHR and all states and NGOs to support the attached recommendations in the Dublin Declaration on Empowering Women through Secularism, put together by atheist advocates internationally at a conference in Dublin in 2013.

### **5. Change relations of OSCE and States with the Holy See/Catholic Church**

OSCE/ODIHR and all states to treat the Vatican/Holy See/Catholic Church as an NGO religion, and not as a State, and the Holy See to choose not to undermine civic democracy by telling politicians to follow religious ethics instead of legislating for all citizens.

## **B - Recommendations related to Ireland for Session 14**

### **6. Constitutional amendments regarding freedom of religion or belief**

OSCE/ODIHR and Ireland to support atheists having the same legal recognition that is given to religious people in Ireland. The Constitution prevents only discrimination between religions, not between religions and nonreligious philosophical groups. Specifically, OSCE/ODIHR to reinforce to Ireland, and Ireland to urgently implement, the following constitutional changes:

6.1 Amend Article 40.6.1 of the Constitution, and repeal sections 36 and 37 of the Defamation Act 2009, to remove the offence of blasphemy from Irish law.

6.2 Replace the obligatory religious oaths in Articles 12.8, 31.4 and 34.5 of the Constitution (for President, Judges and members of the Council of State including Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister), and the optional oaths and declarations in court, with single neutral declarations that reveal no information about the religious or nonreligious philosophical beliefs of the oath-taker.

6.3 Amend Article 40.1 of the Constitution to guarantee equality to all and to proscribe discrimination (direct or indirect) in any area of law on non-exhaustive grounds, as recommended by the Irish Human Rights Commission and the Constitutional Review Group.

6.4 If constitutional change is required to end religious discrimination in the education system, which the Irish State claims is the case, urgently hold a Religious Equality Referendum to bring about such constitutional change.

6.5 Repeal Article 40.3.3 of the Irish Constitution, to enable the Oireachtas to legislate for the right to abortion.

## **7. End religious discrimination in the Irish education system**

OSCE/ODIHR to reinforce to Ireland, and Ireland to urgently implement, the following legislative and/or constitutional changes with regard to the education system.

7.1 Implement the recommendations in the Schools Equality PACT, section 15 of this document.

7.2 Amend or repeal Section 15 of the Education Act 1998, Section 7(3)(c) of the Equal Status Act 2000, and Section 37(1) of the Employment Equality Act 1998, to oblige publicly funded schools to deliver educational services, including employment, state curriculum and enrolment, in an objective, critical and pluralistic manner, and with no religious discrimination of any kind.

7.3 Replace the patronage system (in which most schools are publicly funded private schools, each with their own ethos) with an inclusive secular system, in which the foundation is State-run schools that are neutral between religions and atheism, and in which private ethos schools are an add-on alternative as opposed to being the basis of the school system.

7.4 As an interim measure for some families, and only as that, accelerate the divestment programme for schools and ensure the widest possible availability of multi and non-denominational schools. In areas where there is only one standalone school, enforce divestment or change of ethos so that everybody in that area has access to a school with an ethos that is neutral between religions and atheism and does not discriminate based on religion.

7.5 Ensure that there are workable policies in place to accommodate children who have opted out of formal religious education. Ensure that such children are not subject to religion being integrated throughout the remainder of the curriculum, even in denominational schools.

7.6 Ensure that there is an effective complaints mechanism and an effective remedy, in practice and in law, to vindicate breaches of human rights in schools.

7.7 If constitutional change is required to enact any of these recommendations, the Government should urgently hold a Religious Equality Referendum to bring about such constitutional change.

## **8. Amend the Civil Registration Act in Ireland to treat atheists equally**

OSCE/ODIHR to reinforce to Ireland, and Ireland to urgently implement: Amend the Civil Registration Act to treat religious and atheist groups equally, and to remove the effective State monopoly that the Act now provides for private entrepreneurs to sell secular ceremonies for profit after being nominated as solemnisers by the Humanist Association of Ireland.

## **9. Vindicate the reproductive rights of women in Ireland**

OSCE/ODIHR to reinforce to Ireland, and Ireland to urgently implement: Repeal Article 40.3.3 of the Irish Constitution, to enable the Oireachtas to legislate for the right to abortion. Decriminalise abortion by repealing sections 22 and 23 of the Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act 2013. Repeal the Abortion Information Act 1995. Provide a human rights compliant framework for abortion, in law and in practice.

## **10. Redress for historic abuse of women and children in Ireland**

OSCE/ODIHR to reinforce to Ireland, and Ireland to urgently implement: Implement full and independent inquiries into symphysiotomy and Magdalen laundries, leading to prosecutions where wrongdoing is established. Adopt and implement a consistent approach, in line with international human rights law, to all inquiries into historical abuse.

## **11. Implement conclusions of the UN Human Rights Committee**

OSCE/ODIHR to reinforce to Ireland, and Ireland to urgently implement, the following concluding observations of the United Nations Human Rights Committee from its examination in July 2014 of Ireland's breaches of human rights of atheists and minority faiths under the ICCPR:

11.1 Education System: The Committee is concerned about slow progress in increasing access to secular education through establishment of non-denominational schools, divestment of patronage of schools and phasing out integrated religious curricula in schools accommodating minority faith or non-faith children. Ireland should introduce legislation to prohibit discrimination in access to schools on the grounds of religion, belief or other status, and ensure that there are diverse school types and curriculum options available throughout the State party to meet the needs of minority faith or non-faith children.

11.2 Employment: The Committee is concerned that under Section 37(1) of the Employment Equality Acts, religious-owned institutions, including in the fields of education and health, can discriminate against employees or prospective employees to protect the religious ethos of the institution (arts.2, 18, 25 and 27). Ireland should amend Section 37(1) in a way that bars all forms of discrimination in employment in the fields of education and health.

11.3 Religious Oaths: The Committee is concerned at slow pace in amending Constitutional provisions that oblige individuals wishing to take up senior public office positions such as President, Council of State and judiciary to take religious oaths. Ireland should amend articles 12, 31 and 34, taking into account general comment No. 22 (1993) concerning the right not to be compelled to reveal one's thoughts or adherence to a religion or belief in public.

11.4 Blasphemy Law: The Committee is concerned that blasphemy continues to be an offence under article 40.6.1(i) of Constitution and section 36 of Defamation Act 2009 (art. 19). Ireland should consider removing the prohibition of blasphemy from the Constitution as recommended by the Constitutional Convention, and taking into account the Committee's general comment No. 34 (2011) concerning the incompatibility of blasphemy laws with the Covenant, except in the specific circumstances envisaged in article 20, paragraph 2 of the Covenant.

11.5 Abortion: The Committee told Ireland that it should: Revise its legislation on abortion, including its Constitution, to provide for additional exceptions in cases of rape, incest, serious risks to the health of the mother, or fatal foetal abnormality; Swiftly adopt the Guidance Document to clarify what constitutes a "real and substantive risk" to the life of the pregnant woman; and Consider making more information on crisis pregnancy options available through a variety of channels, and ensure that healthcare providers who provide information on safe abortion services abroad are not subject to criminal sanctions.

11.6 Majority Votes: During the UNHRC session, Ireland said the reason that it denies pregnant women their abortion rights under the Covenant was because they are expressing the will of the people as expressed through referendum. The UN Human Rights Committee told Ireland that this reason was totally unacceptable. It said that human rights cannot be denied by a majority vote in Parliament, and that the whole point of international human rights law is to avoid the tyranny of the majority. The Committee invited Ireland to withdraw that as a reason for not fulfilling its Convention duties, and Justice Minister Frances Fitzgerald did withdraw it.

**12. Implement conclusions on the right to education of UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights 2015, UN Human Rights Committee under ICCPR 2014, European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance 2013, UN Committee on Elimination of Racial Discrimination 2011, UN Human Rights Committee under ICCPR 2008, Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities 2006, UN Committee on the Rights of the Child 2006, and UN Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination 2005.**

OSCE/ODIHR to reinforce to Ireland, and Ireland to urgently implement, the following eight recent United Nations and Council of Europe Recommendations in relation to education in Ireland. It is clear that there are many human rights violations in the Irish education system.

12.1 UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 2015

Concluding Observations – E/C.12/IRL/CO/3 “Non-discrimination

1. While noting the existence of a number of laws, including the Equal Status Act 2000, to provide equality provisions in the State party, the Committee is concerned that those laws do not provide a full range of grounds of discrimination prohibited by the Covenant (art. 2.2).

The Committee recommends that the State party adopt comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation that includes all the grounds for discrimination set out in article 2, paragraph 2, of the Covenant. The Committee refers in this regard to its General Comment no. 20 (2009) on non-discrimination and economic, social and cultural rights.”

Right to education

30. The Committee is concerned at the discrimination faced by children with disabilities, migrant children, children belonging to a religious minority, Traveller and Roma children, including:

- (a) Legal provisions, such as Section 7 of the Equal Status Acts 2000, which allow schools to give preference to admission of students based on religion;
- (b) Discriminatory criteria against children with special educational needs contained in many admissions policies and the lack of a regulatory framework; and
- (c) Adverse effects of the austerity measures on the education sector, including the reduced number of teachers, rationalisation of teacher/student support services, abolition of grants to schools, increase in transport charges and reduced allowance for clothing and footwear, which further restrict disadvantaged children from attending schools (arts. 13 and 14).

The Committee recommends that the State party:

- (a) Take all necessary measures to bring all relevant laws, including the Equal Status Acts 2001 and the Education (Admission to Schools) Bill 2015 in line with the international human rights standards and to increase the number of non-denominational schools at the primary and post-primary education levels;
- (b) Review admissions policies of all schools with a view to removing all discriminatory criteria for enrolment and establish a regulatory mechanism to monitor school policies, including admissions policies; and
- (c) Revoke the austerity measures which affect disproportionately disadvantaged children.

## 12.2 UN Human Rights Committee under ICCPR, 2014

International Covenant on Civil & Political Rights  
CCPR/C/IRL/CO/4  
Freedom of religion

The Committee is concerned at the slow pace of progress in amending the provisions of the Constitution that oblige individuals wishing to take up senior public office positions, such as President, members of the Council of State and members of the judiciary, to take religious oaths. It is also concerned about the slow progress in increasing access to secular education through the establishment of non-denominational schools, divestment of the patronage of schools and the phasing out of integrated religious curricula in schools accommodating minority faith or non-faith children. It expresses further concern that under section 37 (1) of the Employment Equality Acts, religious-owned institutions, including in the fields of education and health, can discriminate against employees or prospective employees to protect the religious ethos of the institution (arts. 2, 18, 25 and 27).

The State party should take concrete steps to amend articles 12, 31 and 34 of the Constitution that require religious oaths to take up senior public office positions, taking into account the Committee's general comment No. 22 (1993) on freedom of thought, conscience and religion, concerning the right not to be compelled to reveal one's thoughts or adherence to a religion or belief in public. It should also introduce legislation to prohibit discrimination in access to schools on the grounds of religion, belief or other status, and ensure that there are diverse school types and curriculum options available throughout the State party to meet the needs of minority faith or non-faith children. It should further amend section 37 (1) of the Employment Equality Act in a way that bars all forms of discrimination in employment in the fields of education and health.

## 12.3 European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance, 2013

101. In its third report ECRI urged the Irish authorities to promote the establishment of multi-denominational or non-denominational schools and adopt the necessary legislation to that end. The authorities should also ensure that the current opt-out system in denominational schools is implemented in a manner which does not make pupils feel singled out.

## 12.4. UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, 2011

Seventy-eighth session – 14 February – 11 March 2011 Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 9 of the convention.  
Concluding observations of the Committee

26. The Committee recalls its previous concluding observations (CERD/C/IRL/CO/2) and notes with concern that the education system in the State party is still largely denominational and is mainly dominated by the Catholic Church.

The Committee further notes that non-denominational or multi-denominational schools represent only a small percentage of the total and, regrets that, according to reports, there are not enough alternative schools, and students of the Catholic faith are favoured for enrolment into Catholic schools against students of other faiths in case of shortage of places. The Committee further expresses its regret that the provisions of the Equal Status Act give the power to schools to refuse to admit students to denominational schools on grounds of religion if it is deemed necessary to protect the ethos of the school (articles 2, 5(d)(vii) and 5(e)(v))

Recognising the ‘intersectionality’ between racial and religious discrimination, the Committee reiterates its previous concluding observations (CERD/C/IRL/CO/2) and recommends that the State party accelerates its efforts to establish alternative non-denominational or multi-denominational schools and to amend the existing legislation that inhibits students from enrolling into a school because of their faith or belief. The Committee further recommends to the State party to encourage diversity and tolerance of other faiths and beliefs in the education system by monitoring incidents of discrimination on the basis of belief.

#### 12.5 UN Human Rights Committee under ICCPR, 2008

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. (arts. 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. (Article 2 Freedom from Discrimination, Article 18 Freedom of Conscience, Article 24 The Right of the Child, Article 26 Equality before the Law.)

#### 12.6 Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities 2006

Second Opinion on Ireland, adopted on 6 October 2006  
Strasbourg, 30 October 2006  
ACFC/OP/II(2006)007  
Denominational schools  
Present situation

98. The Advisory Committee has received detailed information from non-governmental sources on the way in which the limited number of non-denominational or multi-denominational schools in Ireland – where an overwhelming majority of schools are run by Catholic bodies – can complicate efforts to find a school that would adequately take into account the cultural or religious background of non-Catholic minority children. The Advisory Committee welcomes the fact that the Irish authorities are paying increasing attention to the issue and that there is a commitment to step up support for expanding the network of non-denominational or multi-denominational schools. This has already resulted in the establishment of a number of new multi-denominational primary schools in recent years, although progress in this respect still appears to lag behind growing demand.

99. The Advisory Committee stresses that, in addition to widening the non-denominational and multi-denominational school network, there is a legal obligation to ensure that, in denominational schools, there is a possibility to opt out of religious instruction. It is important that this possibility is offered and organised in a manner that does not unduly single out the pupils concerned. The Advisory Committee further recalls that the above issues are likely to only increase in importance as the religious and cultural diversity of the country expands further.

Recommendations

100. The Advisory Committee urges the authorities to pursue their commitment to widen schooling options, including in terms of non-denominational and multi-denominational schools, in a manner that ensures that the school system reflects the growing cultural and religious diversity of the country.

## 12.7 UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2006

CRC/C/IRL/CO/2

60. The Committee reiterates the concern raised by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in its concluding observations on the initial and second periodic reports of the State party (CERD/C/IRL/CO/2) that non-denominational or multi-denominational schools represent less than 1 % of the total number of primary education facilities.

61. The Committee encourages the State party to take fully into consideration the recommendations made by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD/C/IRL/CO/2, para. 18) which encourages the promotion of the establishment of non-denominational or multi-denominational schools and to amend the existing legislative framework to eliminate discrimination in school admissions.

## 12.8 UN Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination, 2005

CERD/C/IRL/CO/2 – UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination – Sixty-sixth session 21 February – 11 March 2005 – Concluding observations.

“18. The Committee, noting that almost all primary schools are run by Catholic groups and that non-denominational or multi-denominational schools represent less than 1% of the total number of primary educational facilities, is concerned that existing laws and practice would favour Catholic pupils in the admission to Catholic schools in case of shortage of places, particularly in the light of the limited alternatives available. (article 5(d)(vii) and 5(e)(v))

The Committee, recognising the “intersectionality” of racial and religious discrimination, encourages the State party to promote the establishment of nondenominational or multi-denominational schools and to amend the existing legislative framework so that no discrimination may take place as far as the admission of pupils (of all religions) in schools is concerned.”



## C - Supporting Documents

### 13. Schools Equality PACT - Patronage, Access, Curriculum, Teaching

# THE SCHOOLS EQUALITY PACT

We ask the Oireachtas (Irish Parliament) to urgently pass a comprehensive Schools Equality Bill to reform the current State-funded religious discrimination. This PACT (Patronage, Access, Curriculum, Teaching) describes the changes that are collectively needed. The State has a duty to respect equally the human rights of all children, parents and teachers. This requires a national network of public secular schools, inclusive of all, neutral between religions and atheism, and focused on the educational needs of all children equally. Divesting some religious schools to new private patrons will not achieve pluralism in education. The Oireachtas Education Committee has warned that multiple patronage and ethos can lead to segregation and inequality. The UN and Council of Europe have warned our schools breach human rights. The State now claims it is constitutionally obliged to allow State-funded schools to discriminate against its own citizens in this way. Others disagree. We ask the Government to respect democracy, and stop closing down debate with an unpublished, untested legal opinion. Finally, if the Courts do find that the Constitution obliges the State to support this discrimination, then we urgently need a Schools Equality Referendum.

#### **P = PATRONAGE**

##### **Children have a right to attend inclusive public schools**

State-funded schools should have an inclusive public ethos, to respect everyone equally under Articles 42.1 and 42.3.1 of the Constitution. Moral education should be separate from religion, as per Article 42.3.2. The State should not cede control of education to private patrons. Private ethos schools should be an optional extra, not the basis of the system. Please amend the Education Act to do this. Start the reform in the nine schools where the Minister for Education is patron.

#### **A = ACCESS**

##### **Children have an equal right to attend their local public school**

Children should have equal access to their local State-funded school, whatever their religion. The Admission to Schools Bill will outlaw some discrimination, but it reinforces discrimination against atheist and minority faith families, calling it 'lawful oversubscription criteria.' Please delete Section 7.3(c) of the Equal Status Act to prevent all religious discrimination. If oversubscribed, give priority to children with siblings in the school, then to local children, then use a lottery.

#### **C = CURRICULUM**

##### **Children have a right to an objective pluralist education**

Children should be taught the State curriculum, including about religions and beliefs, in an objective, critical and pluralistic manner, as per the European Convention on Human Rights. Faith formation should be outside the school day. Please amend S 15.2(b) of the Education Act, and the curriculum. Remove Rule 68 of National Schools, that religious instruction is by far the most important subject and a religious spirit must inform and vivify the whole work of the school.

#### **T = TEACHING**

##### **Teachers have an equal right to work in state-funded schools**

Children should be taught by the best teachers, and teachers should have equal access, based on merit, to jobs in State-funded schools. Section 37 of the Employment Equality Act allows schools to discriminate against teachers on the ground of religion. The current Section 37 Amendment Bill will protect Catholic LGBT teachers, but reinforces discrimination against atheist and minority faith teachers. Please amend Section 37 to prevent all religious discrimination against teachers.

**WE URGENTLY NEED A SCHOOLS EQUALITY BILL  
WE MAY NEED A SCHOOLS EQUALITY REFERENDUM**

<http://schoolsequality.ie> — [info@schoolsequality.ie](mailto:info@schoolsequality.ie) — <http://atheist.ie>

## 14. Dublin Declaration on Secularism and the Place of Religion in Public Life

### Atheist Ireland

<http://atheist.ie>

# Dublin Declaration on Secularism and Religion in Public Life



On 5 June 2011, the World Atheist Convention in Dublin discussed and adopted the following declaration.

### 1. Personal Freedoms

- (a) Freedom of conscience, religion and belief are private and unlimited. Freedom to practice religion should be limited only by the need to respect the rights and freedoms of others.
- (b) All people should be free to participate equally in the democratic process.
- (c) Freedom of expression should be limited only by the need to respect the rights and freedoms of others. There should be no right in law 'to not be offended'. All blasphemy laws, whether explicit or implicit, should be repealed and should not be enacted.

### 2. Secular Democracy

- (a) The sovereignty of the State is derived from the people and not from any god or gods.
- (b) The only reference in the constitution to religion should be an assertion that the State is secular.
- (c) The State should be based on democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Public policy should be formed by applying reason, and not religious faith, to evidence.
- (d) Government should be secular. The state should be strictly neutral in matters of religion and its absence, favouring none and discriminating against none.
- (e) Religions should have no special financial consideration in public life, such as tax-free status for religious activities, or grants to promote religion or run faith schools.

- (f) Membership of a religion should not be a basis for appointing a person to any State position.
- (g) The law should neither grant nor refuse any right, privilege, power or immunity, on the basis of faith or religion or the absence of either.

### 3. Secular Education

- (a) State education should be secular. Religious education, if it happens, should be limited to education about religion and its absence.
- (b) Children should be taught about the diversity of religious and nonreligious philosophical beliefs in an objective manner, with no faith formation in school hours.
- (c) Children should be educated in critical thinking and the distinction between faith and reason as a guide to knowledge. Science should be taught free from religious interference.

### 4. One Law For All

- (a) There should be one secular law for all, democratically decided and evenly enforced, with no jurisdiction for religious courts to settle civil matters or family disputes.
- (b) The law should not criminalise private conduct on the grounds that the doctrine of any religion deems such conduct to be immoral, if that private conduct respects the rights and freedoms of others.
- (c) Employers or social service providers with religious beliefs should not be allowed to discriminate on any grounds not essential to the job in question.

## 15. Dublin Declaration on Empowering Women Through Secularism

Atheist Ireland

<http://atheist.ie>

# Dublin Declaration on Secularism Empowering Women



On 30 June 2013, an international conference in Dublin on Empowering Women Through Secularism discussed and adopted the following declaration.

### 1. Secular Values in Society

- (a) The secular values that will empower women are science-based reason, equality and empathy in alliance with the principles of feminism.
- (b) Priorities in democratic states: secular values will protect and advance already-established freedoms. Cultural and religious beliefs must not be used to deny or limit these freedoms.
- (c) Priorities in nondemocratic states: where secular values are not recognised or protected by laws, such laws should be established and applied, and address the issues that deny women full participation in society and government.

### 2. Separation of Religion and State

- (a) Priorities in democratic states: the Constitution should make explicit mention of the separation of religion and state. The state should not fund religions or beliefs. Also, social services, health care services or education accorded to citizens should respect the law; and all state practices should be neutral.
- (b) Priorities in nondemocratic states: certain things are fundamental in order to take first steps towards separation of religion and state. Access to education and information should be free and unrestricted. The international community should be vigilant on the application of human rights and take appropriate action where necessary.

### 3. Human Rights

- (a) Human rights are universal, and should be applied equally in democratic and nondemocratic states. Women's rights are human rights, not separate rights for women.

- (b) Priorities in democratic states: women should have equal sexual, reproductive and economic rights in practice as well as in legislation.
- (c) Priorities in nondemocratic states: the right to autonomy, self-determination as an individual, and fully equal treatment at all levels of society for men and women. This takes precedence over religious or ideological dogma.

### 4. Reproductive Rights

- (a) Priorities in democratic states: the state should recognise and respect the right to universal and absolute bodily ownership. Reproductive healthcare services should be free, accessible, non-judgmental and objective. Comprehensive evidence-based sex education should be universally available.
- (b) Priorities in nondemocratic states: human rights conventions should be honoured in their entirety, and directives should not be vetoed on religious grounds or otherwise. International assistance should be given to grassroots campaigns involved in the provision and promotion of comprehensive reproductive health services and education.

### 5. Politics and Campaigning

- (a) Priorities in democratic states: it is essential to define the concept of morality as not being exclusive to religion, and to clearly promote secular feminist values as being beneficial to all citizens. These values should be communicated to citizens in a concise accessible manner using whatever means are available in order to promote the growth of a wider secular community in the future.
- (b) Priorities in nondemocratic states: we should amplify the voices of secular feminists fighting back against oppressive regimes throughout the world, and we should promote strategies and tools to overcome technological arrears in nondemocratic countries.