

**Press Release 10<sup>th</sup> March 2010**

## **Adoption/Children's Rights Organisations Unite to Challenge Adoption Bill**

A coalition of adoption and children's rights organisations was established this week to urge Minister for Children, Barry Andrews, to amend the 2009 Adoption Bill in order to ensure the rights of the adopted child and more than 42,000 adopted people and their natural families are included.

The Adoption Bill 2009 deals almost exclusively with intercountry adoption, and while the implementation of the Hague Convention is to be welcomed, the Bill ignores the highly significant area of information and tracing rights and services for Ireland's 42,000+ adopted people and their extended families. **Norah Gibbons**, Director of Advocacy at **Barnardos** said "The voice of the child was not heard when the decisions around their adoption were made. We must now redress that wrong, it is crucial that as adults their voices are not further silenced. The Adoption Bill must be amended to include information and tracing rights for adopted people and their natural families."

**Susan Lohan** from **Adoption Rights Alliance** said: "The much anticipated children's rights amendment to the Constitution will also have implications for adoption legislation; the critical failure of the Department of Health and Children to acknowledge the rights of adopted children and adults in this legislation is not in keeping with the proposed amendment to strengthen children's rights in the Constitution. **Bernie Harold** from **Adoption Loss-Natural Parents Network of Ireland** echoed this and said: "The traumatic impact on natural parents of the loss of their children to a closed adoption system is immense. Further, adopted people should have the right to know they are adopted and all parties should have access to support and counselling services."

Adopted people in England, Wales and Northern Ireland have had the right to their birth certificates and adoption files since the 1970s. In stark contrast here in Ireland, adopted people have no such rights. The closed secret system that was borne out of the original 1952 legislation is still in existence and will continue if the 2009 legislation is enacted in its present form.

**Claire McGettrick** from **Adoption Rights Alliance** said: "An estimated 10,000 adopted people and their natural families have registered with the Adoption Board and other agencies seeking information about each other. The lack of a legislative basis for both adoption agencies that provide information and tracing services and the National Adoption Contact Preference Register will not guarantee that these services will continue and is extremely unsatisfactory for everyone affected by adoption."

**Sheila Gallagher** of the **Council of Irish Adoption Agencies** added: "The lack of a legislative basis for services that are currently operational is unacceptable. This has a direct impact on service provision, the net effect being lengthy waiting times for adopted people and natural families. This is particularly unfair in the context of aging natural parents and the basic right of equity of access to services for all parties to an adoption. Council members advocate on the basis of the right of adopted persons to have access to the same information on their origins as do other citizens; a right that if it were taken away from other citizens, would be immediately seen as a violation. Therefore we are seeking an amendment to the Bill to allow adopted adults to have access to their birth certificate and family history."

**Tom Walsh** of **Know My Own** questioned why the Minister has ignored the statutory Adoption Board's long standing advice on the inclusion of Information and Tracing rights in legislation as well as 40 years of research on the basic psychology of adoption and the needs of those affected by it.

During an extensive Consultation Process in 2003 undertaken by the then Minister for Children, Brian Lenihan, the right to information and tracing services was widely acknowledged. It is highly regrettable according to the professional and advocacy groups in this coalition that Minister Andrews has failed to implement the suggestions from this consultation process or to provide any coherent rationale for the failure to amend the legislation during his many meetings with the various groups.

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