



Northern Ireland Assembly

AD HOC COMMITTEE ON A BILL OF RIGHTS

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

Thursday 25 February 2021

Virtual Meeting, StarLeaf

Present, via StarLeaf: Emma Sheerin MLA (Chairperson)
Mike Nesbitt MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Paula Bradshaw MLA
Mark Durkan MLA
Michelle McIlveen MLA
Carál Ní Chuilín MLA
Christopher Stalford MLA

Apologies: None

In Attendance: Caroline Perry (Assembly Clerk)
Gareth Cross (Clerical Officer)
David McClure (Assistant Assembly Clerk)

The meeting commenced in open session at 2.05 pm.

1. Apologies

As noted above.

2. Briefing by Dr Robin Wilson: Perspective on a Bill of Rights

Dr Robin Wilson, an expert advisor to the Council of Europe on Intercultural Integration, joined the meeting via StarLeaf at 2:05 pm.

Dr Wilson said that the formulation for a bill of rights within the Belfast Agreement was problematic. He said that a bill of rights is incompatible with the notion that you can have parity of esteem between two communities because you cannot have a democracy based on two communities, and because rights must be something that an individual can claim. He suggested that these challenges help to explain why previous attempts to achieve a bill of rights have failed.

Dr Wilson said that there is an alternative approach which is compatible with the ideas that constitutions are based on individual citizenship and that individuals are bearers of human rights. He thought that the formulation used by the Council of Europe and the United Nations: *'persons belonging to'* could be used to formulate a bill of rights for Northern Ireland. He thought that a bill of rights could give rights to *'persons belonging to'* by incorporating into domestic law the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

The oral evidence was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked Dr Robin Wilson for his evidence.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

Christopher Stalford joined the meeting at 2:19pm.

3. Briefing by Jonna Monaghan: Perspective on a Bill of Rights

Jonna Monaghan, Project Coordinator of the Northern Ireland Women's European Platform (NIWEP), joined the meeting via StarLeaf at 2:45 p.m.

Jonna noted that NIWEP aims to share the views and experiences of women and promote gender-responsive policy and decision making at a local, regional and national level. She noted existing rights from international law, and said that the core issues in relation to a bill of rights related to the lack of implementation and realisation of rights in a meaningful way. Jonna also noted that women are less able to participate in public life, for example in relation to their caring responsibilities. She said that a bill of rights should be based on existing human rights treaties, including the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

The oral evidence was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked Jonna Monaghan for her evidence.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to commission research on gender budgeting, CEDAW and gender-based violence.

4. Chairperson's Business

No Chairperson's business.

5. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Ad Hoc Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 18 February 2021.

6. Matters Arising

No Matters Arising.

7. Correspondence

Members noted correspondence from Kathy Gray and the Public Accounts Committee.

8. Forward Work Programme

The Chairperson referred Members to the draft Forward Work Programme.

Members agreed the Forward Work Programme.

9. Any other business

There was no other business.

10. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting will be on Thursday 4th March 2021 at 2.00 pm where the Committee will hear from the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission and Here NI.

The meeting adjourned at 3.23 p.m.

Ms Emma Sheerin MLA
Chairperson, Ad Hoc Committee