

## The Gathering Response to Ad hoc Committee on Bill of Rights

### Introduction

The Gathering is a grass roots collective of over 50 community based environmental campaigns based over 8 counties in Ireland. We are supported many individual environmental activists and local communities seeking to restore and enhance our environment (our land, air and water)

The Gathering supports the introduction of a Northern Ireland Bill of Rights. A strong and inclusive Bill of Rights is essential to the development of an inclusive, equitable, just and peaceful Northern Ireland society. It is a shame that over 20 years since the signing of the GFA that such a Bill has not been implemented as yet.

The Gathering supports the call for the inclusion of the **rights of nature, rights of communities** as part of an overall Bill of Rights. Such inclusion will highlight the integral links between the rights of humans on the rights of nature. We are in the middle of a climate emergency: the planet and its resource is are seen as commodities to be used and exploited in the name of wealth and profits. This cannot be sustained: when we as humans ask for our rights to clean air, clean water, a healthy safe environment in which to raise our children then it follows that the air and the water must also have rights to be clean and these rights need to be embedded within legislation.

Often the human rights of indigenous populations are ignored as big businesses exploit and extract the natural resources, which indigenous communities rely on, for their own profit making interests. This cannot continue as the Earth resources are not infinite and do not belong to one small powerful group of corporations. Environmental legislation as it currently exists favours big business interests as supposed to those of local communities.

Inserting the rights of communities within a Bill of Rights would allow local communities to use the legislative powers of their local councils to implement laws that protect their rights as humans. Laws such as the right to clean air water as mentioned above and also to a healthy environment within which to live .

Combining the insertion of rights of communities with the rights of nature within the Bill of Rights for NI means that local government institutions could use their powers to introduce laws recognising the rights of nature right such as the right tooth be healthy, free from man made pollution and industrial waste, the freedom of nature to evolve, regenerate and be restored .

## **Conclusion**

Human Rights and Natures Rights (and rights of communities) are interlinked as the climate emergency is showing us. Each will be stronger by recognition of the other and will help us all to find a new way of living that nurtures (not destroys) all our life support systems

In submitting this response to the ad hoc committee on the Bill of Rights, The Gathering also endorses the submission of Friends of The Earth NI and the submission of the Human Rights Consortium.

Submitted by:

Nuala Crilly

On behalf of The Gathering,

C/o St Columbs Park House

4 Limavady Rd,

Derry

BT476JY