



**Churches  
in Ireland**  
Connecting  
in Christ

Mr Tom Arnold  
Chairperson  
Constitutional Convention  
Secretariat  
16 Parnell Square East  
Dublin 1

31 October 2013

Dear Mr Arnold,

RE: CONSIDERATION FOR THE REMOVAL OF BLASPHEMY FROM THE  
*CONSTITUTION OF IRELAND BUNREACTH NA HÉIREANN*

The Irish Council of Churches was founded in 1923 in the aftermath of the Civil War and is the formal national body through which member Churches engage, dialogue and act on a wide variety of issues. Together with the Irish Inter-Church Meeting, which incorporates the Catholic Church, our membership reflects the contemporary landscape of Irish Christianity across Protestant, Orthodox, Reformed, Catholic, Independent and Migrant-led Churches and encompass the vast majority of Christians within Ireland (see list of members below).

The current President is Rev Fr Godfrey O'Donnell, chair of the Orthodox Network of Churches, Vice-president is the Rev Dr Donald Watts, Clerk of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and our immediate Past-president is the Most Rev Richard Clarke, Church of Ireland Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of all Ireland. The Council President and Cardinal Séan Brady co-chair the Inter Church Meeting.

Ahead of the examination by the Constitutional Convention of the proposal to remove the offence of blasphemy from the *Constitution of Ireland* on 2nd November 2013, our member churches have been reflecting on the values and principles that should underpin the human right to freedom of religion and freedom of conscience in a truly inclusive, pluralist Ireland.

As Churches in Ireland we acknowledge that the current reference to blasphemy in the *Constitution of Ireland* is largely obsolete and may give rise to concern because of the way such measures have been used to justify violence and oppression against minorities in other parts of the world.

The promotion of freedom of religion and freedom of conscience for all in society greatly enriches the social fabric of a country, and is one aspect of respect for the dignity of human persons. The human right of faith communities to contribute to public life, including public debate on issues that are of importance to everyone, without being subjected to attack or ridicule, needs to be acknowledged and respected.

We consider that it is vital to ensure that the rights of individuals and communities to practise and live out their faith openly are protected by law. These guarantees may be better achieved through established or new constitutional and legislative provisions for the protection for freedom of religion, belief and expression, as well as legislation against discrimination and hate crimes.

**Irish Council of Churches  
Irish Inter-Church Meeting**

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As Churches we cannot reflect on these questions without expressing our solidarity with all those, throughout the world, who are experiencing persecution, and human rights abuses, because of their faith or beliefs. We urge the Convention to assist the Government of Ireland in making our country a leading example of protection for freedom of religion, freedom of conscience and the human rights of minorities.

We wish to express our gratitude to those who are giving their time to the important task of reviewing key provisions of the Constitution through the work of the Convention. We welcome this constitutional conversation and would be delighted to respond to any queries you may have in this or other areas considered by the convention.

Kind Regards

Yours Sincerely,



Mervyn McCullagh  
Executive Officer

**Churches currently represented are:**

Antiochian Orthodox Church  
Church of Ireland  
Cherubim and Seraphim  
Greek Orthodox Church  
Lutheran Church in Ireland  
Methodist Church in Ireland  
Moravian Church (Irish District)  
Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church  
Romanian Orthodox Church  
Presbyterian Church  
Religious Society of Friends  
Redeemed Christian Church of God  
Roman Catholic Church in Ireland  
Russian Orthodox Church  
Salvation Army (Ireland Division)

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