

COUNCIL FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Convener: Very Rev Dr T.N. HAMILTON, OBE
Secretary: THE CLERK

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The Council for Public Affairs met on three occasions since the 2018 General Assembly to receive reports from its committee, panels and task groups; consider responses to public consultations; and discuss its wider strategy of engagement on issues of public significance.
2. The **State Education Committee** (paragraphs 15-28) oversees matters of state education in Northern Ireland. The committee's main work is to consider educational developments and transmit thinking to the Transferor Representatives' Council, through which the Presbyterian Church in Ireland works with the Church of Ireland and the Methodist Church in Ireland on matters of education policy in Northern Ireland.
3. The **Peace and Reconciliation Panel** (paragraphs 29-33) handles matters of public policy that are relevant to peacebuilding and reconciliation. It was responsible for developing a response on behalf of PCI to the Northern Ireland Office consultation paper on 'Addressing the Legacy of Northern Ireland's Past'.
4. The **Republic of Ireland** (paragraphs 34-40) is responsible for overseeing matters of public policy in the Republic of Ireland.
5. The **Dealing with the Past Project Task Group** (paragraphs 41-44) is responsible for taking forward the project agreed by the 2016 General Assembly to record and examine Presbyterian responses to the Troubles.
6. A substantial paper on human rights is attached for consideration by the Assembly as an appendix to this report.

Introduction

7. This has been a year like no other in living memory. The quagmire of Brexit has virtually paralysed the UK government and preoccupied the government in the Republic of Ireland. Meanwhile the Northern Ireland Assembly has been disgracefully absent, and the scandal of the RHI has still to be worked through. Sadly, there is no obvious end to the crises we are experiencing in our democratic institutions.
8. Inevitably these have made the work of the Council for Public Affairs very difficult, and this is reflected in shorter reports to the General Assembly than is usually the case. Yet very high-grade work has been, and still continues to be done, much of it focused on being well prepared

for a return to some degree of political normality in the future, even though that will take some considerable time.

9. Exceptionally valuable work was undertaken in relation to the NIO consultation paper on 'Addressing the Legacy of Northern Ireland's Past', which took account of previous deliberations within the Council alongside the views and opinions of a range of interested groups and individuals.
10. Since the 2018 General Assembly the Council has also cooperated with the Council for Social Witness and the Council for Congregational Life and Witness, in the latter case responding to an Education Authority consultation paper on a proposed funding scheme for regional and local voluntary youth organisations.
11. A substantial paper on human rights is attached for consideration by the Assembly as an appendix to this report.
12. In September 2018 the Council's Public Affairs Officer – Gavin Norris – left to take up an important policy role in the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. The Council is immensely grateful for Gavin's time with us, characterised by his wide range of interests, his great attention to detail and a deep commitment to bringing the best understanding of biblical teaching to the complex issues faced in today's increasingly secularised society.
13. In January 2019 Karen Jardine became the new Public Affairs Officer. She comes with a wealth of experience in public policy matters as well as being an elder in one of our congregations. She has settled in wonderfully well, and the Council is already deeply indebted to her for her work and the wisdom she brings.
14. As convener I am stepping down at this Assembly. I want however to put on record my deep thanks to all those who have served on Council, and in particular to appreciate publicly those members who have served as conveners of the committee, panels and task groups. Without exception they have shown themselves to be deeply committed in their calling to seek the honour of the Lord in the public realm the length and breadth of our land.

STATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

15. 2018-19 has been another busy year within education and the work of the State Education Committee (SEC) has reflected this. Working with our Methodist and Church of Ireland partners in the Transferor Representatives' Council (TRC) and with colleagues in the Controlled Schools' Support Council (CSSC), our influence within the arena of educational policy has continued to be significant.
16. In September, Public Affairs Officer Gavin Norris, who also undertook the role of PCI Education Secretary, left for pastures new. The SEC would like to commend and warmly thank Gavin for all that he did

to further the work of the Protestant Churches in education and that of PCI specifically. Gavin was a huge asset to the SEC and the TRC, working alongside the other two education secretaries to lobby stakeholders, respond to consultation and further the vision of our churches in a nuanced and pragmatic way. The committee is delighted that his successor, Karen Jardine, has now joined us and looks forward to working closely with her as she brings her considerable skills and experience to bear upon our work.

17. The work of the State Education Committee has focused on the following three broad areas:

Religious Education

18. Work in the area of RE continues to be led primarily by Rev Dr Colin McClure and the SEC is most grateful for his dedication and expertise. Earlier in the year a proposal for the continuation of the Northern Ireland Religious Education Advisory Committee was submitted to the Department of Education (DE). Discussions have continued with the Trustee body which represents Roman Catholic interest in education, DE and the Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA).
19. SEC has been updated on the progress of the RE Core Syllabus Working Group, representative of the four main Churches. Regular meetings have focused on presenting the learning objectives in a style consistent with other curricular material familiar to teachers. Given the current rate of progress it is hoped that this work will be completed imminently. It is therefore anticipated that material for discussion will soon be presented to the Churches for comment.
20. The status of RE and support for those who teach it remains a priority for the Churches, and the RE Support Group set up by TRC has continued to meet. The group, comprising TRC, other stakeholders and serving teachers, is investigating the potential for a dedicated website which will be a vehicle for teachers to network and share good practice; discussions with EA and CCEA are ongoing. Some initial work had been undertaken to allow for the appointment of an intern in conjunction with Stranmillis University College to gather together and make accessible existing resource material. The possibility of utilising an associate to facilitate higher order resourcing is also being discussed with the CSSC.

Policy

21. The mechanism for PCI to input into education policy continues to be through the TRC, with much of the work between meetings of the Executive Committee carried out by the three education secretaries. In the period between Gavin's leaving and Karen's appointment, the SEC convener assumed responsibility for PCI in this area. At each meeting, a detailed update on the work of the EA was presented by TRC representatives on its Board and SEC would wish to record its

thanks to Rev Robert Herron and Edgar Jardine for their work on behalf of the denomination.

22. Throughout the year, TRC has been engaged in responding to and lobbying on:
 - (a) EA Draft Equality Action Plan;
 - (b) Transgender advice to schools;
 - (c) School budgets, including responding to the House of Commons NI Affairs Committee Inquiry into Education Funding in Northern Ireland;
 - (d) Education Transformation Programme;
 - (e) Shared Education;
 - (f) Area Planning;
 - (g) Jointly Managed Church Schools;
 - (h) Fair Exemption Treatment Order.

Governor Reconstitution

23. By far the greatest investment in time and energy has been expended on the reconstitution of the boards of governors of the controlled sector's 558 schools, with over 1,600 Transferor Governors representing the interests of the three Churches.
24. Throughout the process it was most heartening to note that it was this category of governor which was consistently being filled most quickly. This is a testament to those who are willing to serve God in this work and the committee thanks ministers, congregations and those who have agreed to be nominated for this and for their service.
25. The view of the SEC is that the role of Transferor Governors is vital for the preservation and promotion of Christian ideals, values and ethos in controlled schools and the committee has pressed for support for churches in recruiting the right people with the right skills, and for support for those who answer this call. This is especially important as these governors need to understand what their specific roles, rights and responsibilities are in representing the interests – historic and current – of the denominations under whose names they serve.
26. To that end, TRC invested in an updated Transferor Governors' Handbook, which was sent to all congregations and commissioned a recruitment video which appeared on the three Churches' websites and was signposted to all congregations. In addition, during February 2019, TRC Executive members took a roadshow around the province entitled 'Set Apart', which gave training to around 300 Transferor Governors. With input from the Methodist and Church of Ireland education secretaries and the CSSC, and led by the SEC convener, the evenings were the first training events in some time and were widely hailed as useful, informative and empowering for those assuming this role.

27. The past year has served as a reminder of our Church's work in education since the formation of the state of Northern Ireland. It has been a proud history of educating in the midst of poverty, social injustice, conflict and secularisation. It has been a labour of love, with the Church building relationships, supporting staff and pupils, celebrating successes and dealing with tragedies. It has been a mission field for promoting the values of Christianity in an increasingly secular world and traversing increasingly sensitive issues in schools.
28. Yet this year has also shown, in research carried out, that, in spite of a changing society, we can go forward with joy and confidence, secure in the knowledge that those who work in our schools and those who send their children to them see in our values something which they appreciate and embrace. Please pray that God will continue to bless those who would seek to bring a Christian influence to the education of our children and young people.

ANDREW BROWN, Convenor

PEACE AND RECONCILIATION PANEL

29. The past year has been challenging for those in our community who are working to promote peace and reconciliation. In Northern Ireland, as a result of a third year without a functioning Executive and Assembly, critical policy and funding decisions remain on ice with resulting stagnation in our public services and general disillusionment among the voters. In addition, the rancour and confusion over Brexit has been negative for political relationships within Northern Ireland, between north and south, and between the UK and the rest of the EU.
30. The legacy of the past continues to cast a shadow over many in our community. The Northern Ireland Office published for consultation proposals for addressing the past which were based largely on the Stormont House Agreement. A working group, which was appointed to make a PCI response to the consultation, met with a number of victims' groups, political leaders, and the PSNI to help inform our answers to the questions raised in the NIO paper. A response was subsequently agreed by the Council for Public Affairs and submitted to the NIO. This was published on the PCI website and has been appended to the end of this report for information and ease of reference. The outcome of the consultation, which attracted a very large volume of replies, is still awaited at time of writing this report.
31. The panel believes that it is important, despite all the current difficulties, for the Churches to be agents of reconciliation and hope within the community. It was encouraged by the initiative of the Church Leaders to meet with the leaders of the main political parties and the subsequent regional meetings with local politicians and representatives of civic society.

32. The panel held a facilitated workshop in March to consider how best PCI can be a voice for reconciliation in the public square. The lessons coming out of the workshop are being reviewed with the aim of setting out some priorities for the panel's work over the next 3-5 years.
33. The PCI Vision for Society adopted by the General Assembly in 2016 provides a sound biblical framework for the Church's work in reconciliation. Some key parts of the vision statement include:
 - As people saved by grace and called by God to grace-filled relationships,
 - We BELIEVE that the Good News of Jesus Christ challenges and equips us to develop radically new attitudes and relationships;
 - We CONFESS our failure to live as Biblically faithful Christian peacebuilders;
 - ACCORDINGLY, WE AFFIRM Christian peacebuilding to be part of Christian discipleship and reassert the Church's calling to pursue a peaceful and just society in our day;
 - We SEEK a more reconciled community at peace with each other.

That Vision is needed more than ever before.

EDGAR JARDINE, Convener

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND PANEL

The Republic of Ireland Panel met twice since last General Assembly.

34. Presbyterians may be a small minority in the Republic of Ireland but their distinctive witness and influence continues to be recognised in the public square, not least through the participation of former Moderator Very Rev Dr Ivan Patterson in the inauguration of Michael D. Higgins as President of Ireland in November 2018, and the attendance of current Moderator Rt Rev Dr Charles McMullen at an event in January 2019 to mark the centenary of the first meeting of the Dáil. Dr McMullen also met with the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Simon Coveney TD along with the leaders of the main Churches in Ireland in October 2018. The convener was also pleased to join a PCI delegation that met with the Ceann Comhairle of Dáil Éireann and the chairperson of the Committee for the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement in April 2019.
35. The panel continues to oversee education matters in the Republic of Ireland and this year has seen the introduction of a new admissions policy for primary schools. A key change is that all minority religions (less than 10% of the population) are regarded as one group and so schools under Presbyterian patronage can no longer prioritise Presbyterian pupils in terms of admissions. Information has been circulated to presbyteries to assist them as they navigate these new arrangements.

36. An 'education appreciation' evening was hosted by Derry and Donegal Presbytery in February 2019 to acknowledge the work undertaken by staff in schools under Presbyterian patronage in the Donegal area. The Moderator participated in the evening which also included a performance from a local school choir. The panel suggests that other presbyteries may wish to undertake a similar appreciation event.
37. The panel wishes to express its thanks to Mr Stuart Ferguson and Mr Allen McAdam who have served as PCI representatives on the Secondary Education Committee and have both recently stood down from this responsibility. The panel is grateful to Rev Dr Gerry Clinton for taking up one of these positions, with the other one due to be filled shortly.
38. Following a resolution passed by the General Assembly in 2018 in the aftermath of the referendum on the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution of Ireland the panel wrote to the Taoiseach to convey these views. The panel also raised two other substantive issues in its letter to the Taoiseach – the first on the protection of the role of conscience for those in the medical profession, and the second on working to find common ground to keep abortion 'rare'. Work is also underway to establish a task group to review pastoral care for women in pregnancy crises following the referendum and introduction of the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018, which came into effect on 1 January 2019.
39. A referendum on the removal of the offence of blasphemy from the Constitution of Ireland took place in October 2018. The panel supported the position of the Irish Council of Churches (of which PCI is a member), which in a submission to the Constitutional Convention in 2013 urged the government of Ireland to make the country a 'leading example of protection for freedom of religion, freedom of conscience and the human rights of minorities'. The submission went on to say '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'.
40. The panel continues to explore ways in which PCI congregations can work effectively together, and with other churches, on key issues of concern for civic society like migration and other socio-economic issues on which the Church should be heard.

TREVOR MORROW, Convener

DEALING WITH THE PAST PROJECT TASK GROUP

41. The task group's remit is to take forward the project agreed by the 2016 General Assembly to explore how Presbyterians responded to the Troubles from 1968 to 2000. The aim is to tell a wider story than has been available to date, to acknowledge both what is good but also to reflect upon the times when Presbyterians failed to be faithful peacemakers.
42. The task group has worked with Dr Gladys Ganiel and Dr Jamie Yohanis from the Senator George J. Mitchell Institute for Global Peace, Security and Justice. It conducted interviews with 122 people including ordained ministers, security forces personnel, victims and survivors, ex-combatants, emergency responders, quiet peacemakers, politicians, some who left the denomination and critical friends.
43. Dr Ganiel has been working on a 65,000 word book provisionally entitled – *Consider Grace*. It will include the stories emerging from 100 of the interviews and it is aimed to launch the book before the end of 2019. There will be a need for others to write some essays reflecting on the book and the stories it tells. It is hoped that the book will encourage other Presbyterians to tell their own stories in a safe and supportive pastoral environment.
44. The panel is developing resources for use at congregational level, and has hosted five focus groups exploring the themes of lament, memory and reconciliation. It is planned to have one further focus group made up of ministers who have had experience of the Troubles along with those starting out on their ministry. The research has already identified a number of emerging lessons including the following:
 - (a) Many ministers in our church were also first responders i.e. those dealing immediately with an atrocity in the area;
 - (b) Many victims/survivors felt that while the pastor at the time of the tragedy was supportive, the church as an institution and succeeding pastors have been less attentive. There is therefore a need for improved training and pastoral support for ministers/lay workers still dealing with trauma;
 - (c) Forgiveness and reconciliation are complex matters both theologically and in practice, and do not have the same meaning for everyone;
 - (d) Spiritual resources such as prayer, Bible reading, pastoral visits and hymns have helped many people towards healing;
 - (e) There is a need to remedy a perceived lack of acknowledgement of victims by PCI, other churches, and wider society;
 - (f) The lack of an agreed societal manner of dealing with the legacy of the past is directly affecting present day relationships;
 - (g) There is a need to create spaces for lament as well as praise.

TONY DAVIDSON, Convener

APPENDIX 1

Response of the Council for Public Affairs of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland to the Northern Ireland Office consultation paper: Addressing the Legacy of Northern Ireland's Past.

General comments

1. The Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI) has over 217,000 members belonging to 537 congregations across 19 presbyteries throughout Ireland, north and south. The Council for Public Affairs is authorised by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland to speak on behalf of the PCI on matters of public policy. We welcome the opportunity to respond to the Northern Ireland Office Consultation Paper: 'Addressing the Legacy of Northern Ireland's Past'.
2. As one of Ireland's largest Christian denominations, and the largest Protestant Church in Northern Ireland, PCI's membership is comprised of people from all walks of life and includes victims and survivors, security forces personnel, emergency responders and many others who are profoundly affected by the Troubles. A significant number of people who were killed or injured were part of, or remain part of, our congregations, and so we have some understanding of the pain and trauma inflicted over the years.
3. It is impossible to quantify the suffering which violence has visited on so many innocent people. We cannot forget the thousands who lost their loved ones; the many who will carry injuries for the rest of their lives and all the others who have seen the destruction of their homes, farms and businesses through acts of terrorism.
4. There was never moral justification for the illegal taking up of arms by republican and loyalist paramilitary organisations. Therefore, it is incumbent upon those organisations and their political representatives to take responsibility for their actions and to acknowledge their wrongdoing. Responsibility for the vast majority of Troubles-related deaths lies with republican (approx. 60%) and loyalist (approx. 30%) paramilitaries.¹ History cannot be rewritten in an attempt to portray as legitimate what was morally wrong and totally unjustified.
5. The governments of the United Kingdom and Ireland should cooperate with any legacy process and be prepared to acknowledge any wrongdoing by the British and Irish states. Furthermore, allegations of illegal conduct by state forces in both jurisdictions should be investigated on the same basis as any other group or institution.
6. We remain greatly exercised that the legal definition of a victim makes no distinction between the perpetrators of violence and those attacked. This is morally unacceptable. A serious effort must be made to deal

1 www.cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/violence/cts/tables.htm

with the sense of moral and judicial outrage and hurt that this causes. We realise that there are strongly opposing narratives about the past, but are convinced that a failure to face this distinction in some coherent way will make progress more difficult.

7. As the consultation paper states, there is broad agreement that current arrangements are not delivering enough for victims, survivors and wider society. There are undoubtedly significant shortcomings in terms of truth, justice and care for people who have been physically and mentally injured during the Troubles. Meaningful discussion about reconciliation and related concepts of forgiveness, grace, remorse and repentance is also worryingly absent. We therefore agree that a new approach is required to address the legacy of the past. The choice we face as a society is between shaping a new approach and retaining the status quo.
8. We are acutely aware of the limitations of the institutions set out in the consultation paper. The sad reality is that, while the pursuit of truth and criminal justice are important elements of addressing the legacy of the past, it is likely that there will be few prosecutions and many families will not receive the information they seek. In this context, it is not right to raise the expectations of victims and survivors, as this will only add to hurt and trauma already experienced. However, we believe that the broad framework with revisions, including those outlined below, represents a potential opportunity to create a system that could provide some degree of closure to victims and survivors and bring a measure of healing to our society. We recognise that the broad framework builds on what was set out in the Stormont House Agreement, which built on previous work of the Haass-O'Sullivan talks and the Consultative Group on the Past. A rejection of this broad framework now would most likely set this issue back by many years or potentially forever, and in doing so add even more distress to that already endured. Therefore, we believe the outworking of the broad framework requires revision, including as outlined below.
9. PCI believes that effectively addressing the past, including the needs of victims and survivors, will enable us all to reimagine and create a better future based on 'a more reconciled community at peace with each other'.² Any suite of measures which fuels a culture of recrimination at the expense of reconciliation will have failed. A clear focus on reconciliation is needed and we welcome the high priority given to it in the opening sections of the consultation paper. PCI believes that reconciliation is fundamentally about the restoration of broken relationships. This will be the ultimate standard by which the success or failure of any new institutions is judged. However, the lack of agreement across society on what constitutes reconciliation is a significant obstacle. We believe there is scope for the Implementation and Reconciliation Group to initiate a public conversation about reconciliation, which we discuss further below.

2 PCI Vision for Society Statement, 2016

10. Few people believe that the £150 million promised by the UK government will cover the cost of the proposed institutions. Any additional funding required must not be expected to come from the devolved administration's budget, as this would divert resources needed for health, education, infrastructure etc. These vital public services are essential to building a peaceful society and so any diversion of funds to legacy bodies would be counterproductive. Moreover, it would be disastrous for work to begin only to be interrupted by funding shortages. It is therefore imperative that the UK government and, where appropriate, the Irish government provide clear guarantees in terms of financing the institutions before any are established.

Historical Investigations Unit (HIU)

11. We recognise that the number of prosecutions resulting from the HIU's work is likely to be minimal and that the HIU is more likely to deliver information to families rather than criminal justice. Even this information may fall short of expectations in many cases. That said, the HIU may provide justice for some families and has the potential to provide a level of closure to a greater number who simply seek more information about the death of their loved ones.
12. As the HIU will have greater powers than the Historical Enquiries Team (HET) we believe families who have received an HET report should have the option to request an HIU investigation, without having to meet the criteria outlined in the consultation paper.
13. It is debatable whether the Northern Ireland Policing Board is the appropriate vehicle for monitoring and holding the HIU to account. Understandable concerns have been raised about the HIU, as it investigates paramilitary murders, potentially being held to account by individual members of the Policing Board who may have held connections to those paramilitary organisations. Moreover, we would have great reservations about the Policing Board being diverted from its primary task of overseeing the day to day work of the PSNI. Therefore, an alternative oversight mechanism may be required that will command greater community confidence – one, perhaps, that has international membership. With whatever option is chosen, proper oversight and accountability must be provided for the HIU and its Director.
14. The relatives of those killed outside Northern Ireland should have equitable access to an investigation, and the UK government should receive a formal commitment from the Irish government that An Garda Síochána will fully cooperate with the HIU in respect of cases with a cross-border dimension. Neither of these points is properly addressed in the consultation paper. Clarity is also needed on the Irish government's responsibility to cooperate in relation to crimes committed or initiated in the Republic of Ireland, and perpetrators who fled there. We note the statement that 'the Irish government have committed to passing their own legislation that will ensure they can give their full cooperation to

the new institutions, in a way that is consistent with their constitutional obligations'.³

15. We are deeply concerned by the conflicting information in the public domain about the focus of legacy cases. For example, some commentators argue that the HIU caseload will include a disproportionate number of deaths attributed to the security forces. Reliable information needs to be provided by government in a way that commands public confidence.

Independent Commission on Information Retrieval (ICIR)

16. Again, we feel it is a moral responsibility of those in public leadership to be realistic about the readiness of those with information about Troubles-related deaths to come forward, and the ability of the ICIR to deliver closure to families. Alleged perpetrators will not be named in family reports and there will be cases in which the information provided to victims and survivors proves unsatisfactory. However, we also recognise that some families could be provided with closure by the ICIR.
17. We share the scepticism widely expressed about the ability of the HIU and the ICIR to run in parallel if an effective firewall is to be maintained between them. This should be re-examined, as a sequential model may be more effective.

Oral History Archive (OHA)

18. PCI supports the establishment of an Oral History Archive. There is a general acceptance that oral history can be one way of addressing the legacy of the past, by providing a cathartic outlet for participants, increasing understanding of other perspectives and educating wider society and future generations.⁴
19. It should not be assumed that a broad range of contributors will readily engage with the OHA. Potential contributors can have a variety of concerns about sharing their experiences of the Troubles, while others do not even recognise the importance of the story they have to tell. Some people are unwilling to tell their story without the involvement of a trusted intermediary. With that in mind we are concerned that outreach and the involvement of community and faith-based organisations in relation to the OHA is not discussed in the consultation paper. To raise awareness and encourage participation, it would be vitally important for the OHA to work in partnership with groups and individuals that have the trust of potential contributors e.g. churches and ministers, community groups etc. A centralised, top-down OHA model is unlikely to work effectively.

3 Consultation paper, 53-54.

4 We note that oral history or 'storytelling' is included in a number of government-sanctioned reports, for example, 'We Will Remember Them', report of the NI Victims' Commissioner, Sir Kenneth Bloomfield (1998); Report of the Consultative Group on the Past (2009); and the Haass-O'Sullivan recommendations (2014).

20. In addition to a central repository, we suggest that a partnership scheme be established to support faith and community groups to act as facilitators. Such a scheme could provide assistance to groups in scoping and designing projects, and make available people with relevant expertise to conduct and transcribe interviews. Crucially, those holding the trust and confidence of potential contributors could raise awareness of the OHA, approach prospective interviewees, be involved in interviews and provide pastoral care, as appropriate. We would be pleased to discuss this idea further with officials.
21. We welcome the proposal for the OHA to involve ‘anyone who has been touched by the Troubles’.⁵ Special effort should be made to involve individuals in hard-to-reach communities, such as those in the border areas, and women, whose role and perspectives are often ignored or overlooked in public discourse about the Troubles. In general, any awareness-raising about the OHA should strongly emphasise the importance of those we have termed ‘quiet peacemakers’ coming forward to tell their stories e.g. civil servants, healthcare workers, teachers, business owners and others who kept our society functioning as normally as possible in the midst of death and destruction. We believe that much could be learnt from these experiences in terms of peacemaking and conflict resolution.
22. The proposals give the Deputy Keeper of the Records significant powers and responsibilities in potentially contentious areas, not least in deciding which records should form part of the archive. The primary role of the steering group to be appointed by the Deputy Keeper is to provide oral history expertise and it would not, as currently described, provide the required level of oversight to properly support the Deputy Keeper and ensure widespread public confidence in the operation of the archive. We therefore urge the government to consider either strongly enhancing the accountability function of the steering group (in particular, a new appointments procedure would be required) or creating a separate oversight mechanism.
23. Overall, PCI sees great potential in the OHA to facilitate individual and societal healing. However, the apparent lack of vision in the consultation paper of what the OHA could achieve is disappointing. Indeed, there is no sense of what is to be achieved by the OHA beyond the production of a ‘factual historical timeline’ and the transmission of themes to the Implementation and Reconciliation Group for the production of an academic report. As listening to the perspectives of others is key to promoting reconciliation, PCI would welcome a discussion of how material gathered would be disseminated and used appropriately across society for this purpose. There is almost certainly scope within education and among community and faith groups to widen and deepen the impact of the OHA’s work.

5 Consultation paper, 44

Implementation and Reconciliation Group

24. Any process to address the legacy of the past must help to restore relationships broken by the many years of violence. We therefore welcome the intention to put the IRG on a statutory footing, as a body tasked with promoting reconciliation. However, the reconciliation aspect of the IRG's work clearly requires significant development. As a first step, we suggest that the IRG initiate a public conversation about reconciliation, what it means to people across society and how it should be promoted.
25. From our perspective, reconciliation is fundamentally about the restoration of broken relationships and will involve a practical balance of the principals of freedom, justice, peace and truth. At a minimum we believe that acknowledgement and expressions of remorse must be central to any discussion of reconciliation.
26. Since healing in our society will, by definition, be a long term intergenerational process, we believe there is an important role that the IRG could fulfil in setting out proposals for public discussion on how to get that long term work underway. That said, we disavow any suggestion that the IRG alone can bring about reconciliation; there must be wide public discussion and agreement both politically and within civic society on the route and shape of societal healing over the coming years. On the basis of that discussion, the IRG could outline steps needed on a short, medium and long term basis, and offer some guidance on the modalities of those steps.
27. The current proposed membership of the IRG is limited to those appointed by government and political parties. This is unacceptable. We believe that there must be civic society involvement to enable the IRG to navigate complex and divisive issues with the necessary level of expertise and community confidence.

Further comments

28. We are concerned that the UK government intends to leave the establishment of a much-awaited Mental Trauma Service to the Northern Ireland Executive, which has not been functional for over 18 months. Given the suite of measures under discussion, it seems quite unreasonable for the government to set aside 'access to high quality services' for victims and survivors due to the continuing political impasse. We urge the government to reconsider this omission.
29. Similarly, we are supportive of a pension for severely physically injured victims and regret that the UK government does not currently intend to address this matter as part of a comprehensive package of legacy measures. It is wrong that much-needed support for innocent victims with life-changing injuries is held up by a dispute about a handful of contentious cases. We note that a number of suggestions have been made to find an accommodation in respect of those cases which would not imply an equivalence between victims and perpetrators. These ideas should be explored further.

30. It is imperative that government does not lose sight of the broader picture when seeking to address the legacy of the past. We are convinced that the path to a more peaceful and reconciled society will be smoother if we give attention to issues which affect our common humanity, including tackling endemic underachievement among sections of our young people, addressing social deprivation and freeing our communities from the grip of criminal gangs. When these matters, which cross the boundaries of sectarian division, are addressed collectively, we believe a better context for human flourishing and building relationships will be created.

APPENDIX 2

HUMAN RIGHTS

1. The language of ‘rights’ is never far from public debate and discussion. There are calls for a ‘rights-based society’; campaigns for the ‘right’ to die at a time and in a manner of one’s own choosing exemplify just one of the many issues that advocacy groups seek to promote; and statutory agencies with responsibility to ‘champion and guard rights’ like the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission or the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission. Legally human rights have an authoritative position as the context for making legislation and for the judiciary as the ultimate arbiter for disputes. The increasing promotion of ‘animal rights’ further widens the conversation.
2. Against this backdrop, and as our society places an increasingly high value on rights which are now seen as the ultimate protectors of freedom and happiness, it is important that we, as a Church, both understand the nature of the debates surrounding human rights and are able to make a meaningful and constructive contribution. This paper seeks to establish a framework, based on biblical principles, which will assist the Council for Public Affairs as it seeks to respond to rights-based issues in the public square.

Definitions

3. Broadly speaking a human right can be described as a right that is possessed, or ought to be possessed by everyone within the state or even across the world. These include the right to clean water, a decent standard of housing, to believe whatever religious views you wish and the right not to be tortured. These basic rights are often described as being based on shared values like dignity, fairness, equality, respect and independence and are usually defined and protected by law. Internationally the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) was adopted by the United Nations in 1948 as a common standard of achievements for all peoples and all nations.

4. While the UDHR might be seen as the founding document for modern understandings of human rights, it is important to note that the language of rights is neither new nor novel. Some point to the Magna Carta as the first iteration of a rights-based framework for what was to become the United Kingdom, while we are all familiar with the rights to “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” enshrined in the American Constitution.
5. Rights are often considered fundamental to civilisation for they are regarded as established pillars of society and culture. In many ways the record of each right and its development can be found in the history of social conflicts. It has been said that rights structure the form of governments, content of laws, and the shape of morality as it is currently perceived.
6. The result is that it is impossible to divorce the concept of rights from the concepts of law and justice. Legal cases, for the most part, can be distilled to the enforcement of rights. For example every person has the right to expect that those with whom they come into contact will not do anything which they foresee will injure them. The law is there to enforce that right.

Philosophy of rights

7. The term ‘rights’ has been used by different groups and people for a range of purposes, some of which are outlined below:
 - (a) Natural rights – universal rights which are said to apply to all people and they exist for every individual and cannot be taken away. These can also be called ‘moral rights’ or ‘inalienable rights’;
 - (b) Legal rights – based on a society’s customary laws, statutes or actions;
 - (c) Claim rights – based on duty when another person has a duty to the right holder. A claim right might be like the example cited above, of each person having a right to expect that those with whom they come into contact will not do anything which they foresee will injure them;
 - (d) Liberty rights – which may be properly described as privileges. A liberty right is simply a freedom or permission for the right holder to do something, like freedom of speech.

Policy framework

8. Practice, policy and legislation relating to human rights continue to evolve. In the UK the key underpinning legislation is the Human Rights Act 1998. The European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and the European Charter on Fundamental Rights also form part of the UK Human Rights legal framework. While withdrawal from the EU means that the European Charter will no longer have effect in the UK, the ECHR will continue to apply as it relates to the Council of Europe of which the UK will remain a member.

9. In the Republic of Ireland the Irish Constitution, ratified in 1937, contains a number of articles on Fundamental Rights (40 – 44) which include matters such as freedom of speech, religious freedom, and family and home life. The 2018 referendum which led to the introduction of legislation on abortion is a key recent change to this part of the Constitution. Ireland is also bound by the European Convention and European Charter on Fundamental Rights.
10. The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) was established in 2000, created as a consequence of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement. Its counterpart, the Irish Human Rights Commission (IHRC) was similarly established in 2000. This leads to an added dimension for human rights discourse in the island of Ireland where the creation of these bodies was a direct consequence of seeking resolution to conflict. Legislation in 2014 led to a merger between the IHRC and the Equality Authority and the creation of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission. In Northern Ireland the Equality Commission, also formed in 2000 as a result of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement, remains a separate entity.

Rights and the legal system

11. It is difficult to divorce the concept of rights from the various philosophies which underpin the legal system. Thus the concept of natural law is fundamental to the concept of natural rights. Natural law is based on the concept of third party principles, such as philosophical reasoning or religious principles. For example, the United States Declaration of Independence placed natural rights on a “self-evident” truth that all men are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights. “Natural rights” have been identified as “life, liberty and property”. These are objective criteria.
12. But the concept of unalienable rights was criticised by English philosophers in the 18th century who spoke of “legal rights” and these were rights which arise from the actions of government, or evolve from tradition and these are not alienable as they will change as actions of government change, as new traditions develop, or there is a shift in society’s moral standards. These are subjective criteria.

Biblical perspective

13. Discourse about human rights can feel distant from biblical language and from the emphasis in our faith of costly service towards the other (e.g. Philippians 2). At times it can also seem like a ‘human rights agenda’ poses a challenge to the articulation, expression and demonstration of Christian belief in the UK and Ireland. However, we are also aware of the severe threat to our brothers and sisters elsewhere in the world who suffer under regimes where even the most basic of human rights, including the right of freedom to worship enshrined in the UDHR, are denied.

14. In 2010 the General Assembly received a report from the Church and Society Committee of the General Council which set out a detailed Christian perspective on human rights. That report, attached as an Annex, remains the biblical framework for our current work and can be summarised as follows:
- (a) We affirm human dignity – human beings are created in God’s image to know him, serve one another and be stewards of the earth, therefore they must be respected;
 - (b) We affirm human equality – human beings have all been made in the same image by the same Creator therefore we must behave without partiality to all; and,
 - (c) We affirm human responsibility – we have to accept that other people’s rights are our responsibility... As God has laid it upon us to love and serve our neighbour, we must fight for his rights, while being ready to renounce our own in order to do so. This, of course, is not an absolute commitment to the expectations or demands of another person, for a Christian response must itself be consistent with both the broad thrust, and specific guidance, of Scripture.
15. Those who promote human rights usually regard these rights as ‘innate’ – they are derived simply through our being human. Of course we recognise that in a very real sense societies have to be ‘rights-based’ or else anarchy would result. However, our theological reflection at the 2010 General Assembly reminds us that the foundation of our engagement with human rights from a Christian perspective is inherently different from those approaching these matters from a secular viewpoint. But this is no reason to shy away from these conversations. As a cross-party group of MPs noted in their 2012 ‘Clearing the Ground Report’ for Christians in Parliament:

“It is a Christian responsibility to proclaim the gospel, challenging injustice and to speak out for those without a voice. In a context of competing claims for power it is critically important that Christians respond rather than react to the challenges they face.”¹

The 21st century

16. How then does PCI respond rather than react to the human rights discourse of the 21st century? Should there be a reliance on natural law, or on the actions of government, or on the contemporary morals of society? How do we deal with conflicting rights?
17. In the first instance our response is immensely practical, affirming human dignity and our belief that all are created in the image of God through the provision of residential respite and day care for adults with severe learning disability at facilities like Aaron House; English classes or legal advice offered to asylum seekers and migrants who

1 www.eauk.org/current-affairs/publications/upload/Clearing-the-ground.pdf
[accessed 26/2/19]

engage with International Meeting Point; and the countless ways local congregations seek to meet the needs in their local communities through, for example, homework or lunch clubs.

18. With this in mind the NIHRC's previous work on vulnerable children in Northern Ireland who cannot be cared for within their own family, or on seeking to improve care in hospital emergency departments could have much to commend it from a biblical viewpoint, although as we have already acknowledged the starting points may be completely different. On the other hand our biblical perspective is challenged by the recent NIHRC action to bring forward a case all the way to the Supreme Court that would introduce a broader definition of termination of pregnancy to Northern Ireland.
19. Conflict can also arise between a right to freedom of conscience with rights of others who wish to do things which are within the law but which would offend the conscience of someone else. The Ashers case has been seen as a clash between the natural right of freedom of conscience as against the legal right of protection against discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation. But that is not a proper characterisation of it. The Ashers case did not in any way abrogate from the duty not to discriminate against anyone in the provision of services on the ground of sexual orientation. What it did say was that a conscientious refusal to promote a particular message was not discriminatory so long as any person, no matter what the personal attributes of that person might be, would be similarly refused. Interestingly, in giving its decision, and as a subsidiary explanation of it, the Supreme Court also observed that the message in support of gay marriage that Ashers were asked to display on the cake was not a proxy for any particular sexual orientation and that "the benefit of the message accrues not only to gay or bisexual people, but to their families and friends and to the wider community who recognise the social benefits which such a commitment can bring."²
20. It is also important to remember that the Supreme Court decision in *Bull v Hall* has not been changed by the Ashers case. In the *Bull v Hall* case the owners of a guesthouse refused a homosexual couple accommodation in a double room in their guest house. Their reason for that refusal was their conscientious objection to homosexual practice, and they did not want their property to be used for practices which they considered sinful. In that case the Supreme Court found that such refusal was discriminatory because a heterosexual couple would not have been refused the accommodation. The sexuality of the couple was the reason for the different treatment, and the different treatment was unlawful discrimination.

2 www.supremecourt.uk/cases/docs/uksc-2017-0020-press-summary.pdf
[accessed 26/2/19]

Conclusion

21. Reflecting on a Christian approach to contemporary thinking on human rights we perceive, along with Professor Julian Rivers of Bristol University that too much of current public debate and discourse is focused on individualism over and against the common good; on autonomy over the legitimate needs and concerns of others; with litigation and conflict becoming early ports of call over the painstaking work of building consensus.³ This will mean that in practice the Presbyterian Church must continue to be cautious about giving full (or even at times partial) support to the growing list of human rights demands that are presumed to follow from those that are considered to be natural rights. Professor Rivers has observed that:

“the concept of a right is a powerful tool for doing certain limited moral and legal jobs. Like any powerful tool it needs to be used carefully, but it should neither be over-worked nor abandoned.”⁴

With this we can agree.

ANNEX TO APPENDIX 2 *(as presented to the General Assembly 2010)*

Human Rights Position Paper – A Church Perspective

Introduction

The area of human rights has become contested in Northern Ireland. Although agreements were made in this area at the time of the Belfast/ Good Friday Agreement difference and division across the community remains. The Churches have found themselves involved in this debate, seeking to bring a Christian perspective to the issues that arise but have always faced the challenge of a highly politicised debate which sometimes fails to become realistic and meaningful outside of the political accommodations that have to be reached. This position paper therefore seeks to draw together the thinking of PCI thereby enabling Presbyterians to engage in discussions about human rights with information to hand from the church.

Clearly, overzealous approaches to this subject can give it a “bad press”. Human rights can be (mis)represented in the media as little more than a charter for criminals, terrorists and anti-social behaviour. However events in some overseas countries show the dire consequences that may

3 www.jubilee-centre.org/beyond-the-morality-of-rights-by-julian-rivers/ [accessed 4/3/19]

4 As above

ensue for the vulnerable (including minority Christian communities) when human rights are disregarded, so the church cannot ignore the issue.

A Christian approach to human rights

A concern for human rights is not exclusive to Christians, for they share it with people of other faiths or of no faith. Christians differ from secular people on the question of where our concern for human rights is grounded. Many secularists would simply assert, along with the American Declaration of Independence, that “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.” (An interesting use of the term “created”!) To Christians, attempts to find a purely secular basis for the worth which human beings have, and which accounts for their rights, are not convincing.

Christians share the belief that human rights are grounded in the inherent worth and dignity of every human being but locate the basis of that worth in the fact that each human being bears the image of God and is redemptively loved by God. John Stott (writing in 1984) said:

The origin of human rights is creation. Man has never “acquired” them. Nor has any government or other authority conferred them. Man has had them from the beginning. He received them with his life from the hand of his Maker. They are inherent in his creation.

(John Stott *Issues Facing Christians Today*, pp143-144).

The simple yet profound declaration of Genesis:

So God created humans to be like himself; he made men and women. (Genesis 1:27 CEV)

means that all human beings enjoy, among other things:

- (i) the right to life and the resources to sustain it, for life is a gift from God;
- (ii) a right to human dignity, i.e. the right to receive respect irrespective of age, gender, race or rank or any other way in which we define individual human beings;
- (iii) a responsibility to secure/protect/establish the rights of others, for God is love. Rights only exist in relationship with others, albeit coming into play most significantly when relationships break down. Christians found their belief in relationship within the Trinity believing that God has made us in the Trinitarian image, for mutual relationship. It is out of this relationship of mutuality that Christians are challenged to love God and our neighbour as ourselves;
- (iv) the right to justice, for all have been created equal before God’s law. Historically Christianity has been a major influence in developing the concept of human rights; it was within the Christian theological tradition that the category of human rights originated. The atheist Friedrich Nietzsche,

intending a criticism, said, "...the poison of the doctrine of 'equal rights for all' – it was Christianity that spread it most fundamentally."

Biblical and theological foundations informing a Christian understanding of human rights

The fall

The fall, human disobedience before God, had lasting effects. The Creator's good gifts can be spoiled by human sin and the area of human rights is no exception. The rights that God gave to all human beings equally can easily be corrupted and spoiled by the very things which a concern for human rights seeks to address, the protection of the weak, marginalised or excluded. When fed by an inflated sense of one's own weakness, or the weakness of one's group, talk of equality in rights can degenerate into arguing for "my rights" regardless of the rights of others. The rights of an individual or group are seldom absolute and must be balanced against the rights of other individuals or groups.

The language of "rights" is usually invoked when there is a breakdown in relationships. Conflict can arise between the rights of one individual or group and those of another, e.g. in the Northern Irish context, between organisations wanting to parade in a certain area and residents who object. There can also be a conflict between the rights of an individual and those of a corporate body, e.g. between the rights of an individual worker and the rights of the company that employs him or her. In such situations of competition there can be a tendency for one group to dominate another, so minorities need to be protected from the tyranny of the majority. All such conflicts over rights are a consequence of our fallenness.

Scripture

The Bible does not use the modern vocabulary of "human rights", as it usually emphasizes the responsibilities of the powerful more than the rights of the weak, but concern for human rights is implicit in Scripture. Given the difference between the Old Testament era (when "church" and "state" were coterminous and made laws for the whole community) and the New Testament era, when Christians were a small and powerless minority, it is understandable that, generally speaking, specific provisions for particular matters are found in the Old Testament and fundamental principles in the New.

Old Testament

The Pentateuch protected the weak and the vulnerable, e.g. "You shall not keep back a hired man's wages till next morning. You shall not treat

the deaf with contempt nor put an obstruction in the way of the blind.” (Leviticus 19: 13-14). It laid down laws about the right to life (e.g. the homicide laws in Numbers 35: 9ff), about property, (e.g. the land laws in Leviticus 25:25-34), and about “the stranger within your gates”. “You shall not oppress a stranger for you were strangers in Egypt” (Exodus 22:21). Concern for the poor is evident in e.g. Deuteronomy 15.11, “I command you to be open-handed towards your brothers and towards the poor and needy in your land” and in the arrangement for poor gleaners at harvest time (Leviticus 19:9-10). The right to a fair trial was recognised. “Hear the law cases and judge righteously between every man and his brother and the stranger; you shall not respect persons in judgment but you shall hear the small as well as the great; you shall not be afraid of the face of man” (Deuteronomy 1:17). The Hebrew prophets too wanted a fair legal system, e.g. “Let justice run down as waters and righteousness as a mighty stream” (Amos 5:24).

New Testament

In the New Testament Jesus taught his disciples that being citizens of the kingdom of God required unworldly thought and action. “The kings of the pagans have power over their people...but this is not the way it is with you” (Luke 22:25, 26). Secular standards were reversed; instead of a self-righteous demanding of rights there was to be the giving of rights by the acceptance of responsibility for others and loving service to them. “Look out for one another’s interests, not just for your own” (Philippians 2:4). Old Testament provisions are sometimes repeated in the New, e.g. the command in Deuteronomy 15, 11 to be open-handed is echoed in 1 Timothy 6.17f : “Command those who are rich in this present world... to be rich in good deeds and to be generous and willing to share.”

Duty to God

The primary motive for Christian concern for human rights is our duty to God. C.S. Lewis, commenting on such phrases as “What right have they...?” “You’ve no right to be here” “I know my rights” “By rights...” etc., observes that behind such phrases “...there is a tacit acknowledgement of some external standard or norm which can be a source of authority, protection or arbitration. Such a standard or norm has to be independent of the parties in the dispute for it to be worth appealing to. It has to ‘transcend’ them both.” (*Mere Christianity* Ch 1). Sometimes that authority may lie in civil law (e.g. on fair employment) but not always; many people using the language of “rights” might find it difficult to say precisely where they find that higher authority. Christians, however, should be in no doubt. “This transcendent norm is God himself – his righteousness and justice” (John Stott).

The Bible indicates that our responsibility for human rights derives primarily from our responsibility to God. Though he might dispute it,

Cain was answerable to God for his brother. Relevant Old Testament injunctions are often reinforced by such statements as “I [the Lord] command you...” (e.g. Deuteronomy 8:11; 10:13; 13:18; 24:18, 22; etc.) The Book of Proverbs observes “He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their maker” (Ch 14:31). Micah, in a much-quoted verse, indicates that it is the Lord who requires us “to do justly” etc. (Ch 6:8). Nehemiah 5 takes up the cause of impoverished farmers who were being forced to mortgage their land and eventually to sell their dependents as pledges to pay off excessive interest to the rich. His appeal to their creditors goes directly to their obligation to God. He asks, “Should you not walk in the fear of our God?” (Ch 5:9).

In modern society many groups are quick to fight for their own needs (though not all “needs” are necessarily “rights”) but the primary Christian motive is not self-interest. Of course there are times when the church should speak up for freedom of thought, conscience and belief; individuals, parents and religious institutions have a right to be distinct, and to promote and protect values consistent with their religious convictions. They should not be obliged by state legislation to promote views contrary to their deeply held religious beliefs (e.g. the traditional Christian view of marriage). The church is also justified in defending its own interests in areas like the employment of staff, claiming the right to employ only those whom it considers morally and spiritually suitable for church work, whatever the secular authorities might say. However, the church’s main motive for debating human rights is not self-interest but duty to God.

Civil law

Given that human relationships do break down, human beings need to be protected from one another, whether as individuals or as corporate groups, and if fundamental human rights are to be enforced, those rights need to be justifiable. However civil law, though necessary, has its limitations, for laws may not make people good. Human rights conventions, charters and legislation cannot achieve everything and risk spawning endless fractious litigation. “Judicial decrees may not change the heart but they can restrain the heartless” (Dr Martin Luther King). Attitudes need to change and that is a message that the Christian gospel preaches as it calls its hearers to a change of heart.

Responsibility

In line with Bible teaching, modern Christians stress responsibilities as well as rights.

“We are very suspicious of reasoning which... detaches rights from responsibilities or elevates rights above responsibilities... In Christian thinking it is sometimes better not to insist on the exercise of a perceived right in the interests of the overall wellbeing of a society... To voluntarily set aside one’s rights is not the same as having them denied.”

(PCI Church and Government submission to the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, 2001).

Paul showed judgment in exercising the different rights he had. He claimed his legal rights as a Roman citizen in relation to corporal punishment (Acts 22:25) and in his appeal to Caesar (Acts 25:11), yet chose a “tent-making ministry” rather than living off the Christian community as he was entitled to do (Acts 20:33-34).

APPLICATION OF CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVES

The foregoing has practical applications in at least three areas.

In the church

Christian communities should strive to exhibit within their own ranks that alternative society which bears the marks of the kingdom of God. The church will thus be a sign to the world of true human existence under the authority of Christ.

“We have to take more seriously Christ’s intention that the Christian community should set an example to other communities.... The life of the local church... is meant to be a sign of God’s rule. The church should be the one community in the world in which human dignity and equality are invariably recognised and human responsibility for each other accepted; the rights of others are sought and never violated, while our own are often renounced; there is no partiality, favouritism or discrimination; the poor and the weak are defended, and human beings are free to be human as God made us and meant us to be.” (John Stott)

In wider society

Christians have responsibilities towards the wider community, sharing with secularists a genuine concern for the welfare of society. The church has the right and the duty to care about that and speak about it. The Christian gospel, with its message of compassion, requires sensitivity to victims and excluded groups, especially if others are not paying much attention to them. The weak and the vulnerable need protection and the church should say so, even if it is an unpopular cause. The struggle for human rights has given the church some of its modern martyrs, e.g. Janani Luwum (Anglican archbishop in Idi Amin’s Uganda), Oscar Romero (Roman Catholic Archbishop of El Salvador at a time of ruthless government repression) or Dr Martin Luther King (Baptist minister in the USA at a time when the Afro-American community was being treated unfairly). Such Christian leaders highlighted exclusion, injustice and intolerance of difference as being among the primary causes of breaches of human rights and of conflicts between individuals and communities, and they took their stand accordingly.

For dealing with governments

Churches have a responsibility under God to address the powers that be. Churches have supported Bills of Rights in such countries as the USA, Canada, the Irish Republic, South Africa and the United Kingdom. No human government is perfect, and the reformed tradition in particular makes provision for the right, even the duty, to resist when human governments violate the purposes for which they were appointed. If necessary the church must be willing to become an offence to the powers that be in its support of the deprived and vulnerable.

Summary to Annex

John Stott provides a useful summary of the Christian position.

Here then is a Christian perspective on human rights. First, we affirm human dignity. Because human beings are created in God's image to know him, serve one another and be stewards of the earth, therefore they must be respected. Secondly, we affirm human equality. Because human beings have all been made in the same image by the same Creator, therefore we must...behave without partiality to all. Thirdly we affirm human responsibility because we have to accept that other people's rights are our responsibility. We are our brother's keeper because God has put us in the same human family and so made us related to, and responsible for, one another. The law and the prophets, Jesus and his apostles, all lay on us a particular duty to serve the poor and defend the powerless. As God has laid it upon us to love and serve our neighbour, we must fight for his rights, while being ready to renounce our own in order to do so.

(Issues Facing Christians Today, pp. 150-151).

RESOLUTIONS

1. That the General Assembly for a second year express deep concern and frustration about the prolonged absence of an Executive in Northern Ireland, the resulting stagnation in public policy and the negative effects on the most vulnerable in society, and repeat their call for all involved in the political process to find a resolution that establishes good and stable government based on good working relationships.
2. That the General Assembly, recognising the limitations in the proposals set out in the Northern Ireland Office's consultation paper on 'Addressing the Legacy of Northern Ireland's past', nevertheless:
 - (a) believe that the broad framework of investigation, information recovery, historical analysis/storytelling and a reconciliation aspect, could with some modification, present a potential opportunity to contribute to bringing a measure of healing to society in Northern Ireland;
 - (b) reiterate that any one-sided suite of measures, which fuels a culture of recrimination at the expense of reconciliation and the restoration of broken relationships, will have failed.
3. That the General Assembly affirm the role of Transferor Governors in the preservation and promotion of Christian ideals, values and ethos within the Controlled Schools' Sector; and commend all those who have agreed to serve as school governors in any capacity during the 2018-2022 term.
4. That the General Assembly, acknowledging the increasing secularisation of the public square in the Republic of Ireland, welcome the opportunities for the Presbyterian Church in Ireland to participate and seek to influence policy for the good of all in society.
5. That the General Assembly commend the paper on 'Human Rights' as guidance for the Presbyterian Church in Ireland's engagement on rights-based issues in the public square.
6. That the report of the Council for Public Affairs be received.