



AN COIMISIÚN UM CHEARTA DUINE
IRISH HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

**Annual Report 2009 Launch
24 August 2010
Éamonn Mac Aodha, Chief Executive**

Minister, President, Commissioners, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I would like to reiterate the President's welcome to you all, and particularly to Minister White.

2009 was a hard year for all those working in the public service and the President has already set out some of the particular challenges which the Commission faced last year. I would like to focus on the achievements of the Commission in 2009, which in light of the difficulties we have faced are a real testament to the hard work of staff and Commissioners. I would also like to take this opportunity to highlight some of the areas in which we will be developing our work over the coming year.

As the President has already emphasised, we are focused on producing high-quality, credible and considered reports, observations and submissions. The objectivity and impartiality which we bring to our work, supported by our basis as a statutory body, allows us to engage with a broad range of actors. The array of bodies that we have worked with over the last year bears particular testimony to this.

We were particularly pleased that engagement with the Supreme Court and High Court increased again in 2009. We also continue to receive a high number of communications from organisations and members of the public across the spectrum of human rights. We were pleased in 2009 to be able to work constructively with An Garda Síochána on human rights in policing on which we published a major policy statement.

Some other key highlights for us in 2009 included the visit by United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Navanethem Pillay and the holding of our 2009 annual lecture which was so memorably addressed by Seamus Heaney.

2009 also saw the publication of our second major Enquiry Report, which considered aspects of Irish immigration law and practice. We also published comprehensive observations on four Bills or schemes of Bills, and provided an update to the UN Human Rights Committee for its one-year follow-up of Ireland's report under the ICCPR. Our increasing focus on the awareness and education aspect of our mandate saw the establishment of an Awareness and Education Committee within the Commission and the development of a Human Rights Education and Training project.

We continued in 2009 our active engagement with colleagues in National Human Rights Institutions throughout Europe, and the world, as well as with regional and international human rights mechanisms. One of the highlights of this was our involvement as partners in the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights' initiative for the enhancement of regional human rights mechanisms. We were also able to provide capacity building support to a number of colleague national institutions in 2009.

Our work with the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, through the Joint Committee, was also an important part of our work in 2009 and included the hosting of a joint conference with UCD on a possible Charter of Rights for the Island of Ireland, which the Committee is mandated to consider under the Good Friday Agreement.

In the coming year, while continuing our work on legal and policy issues, we will also focus on three additional major areas.

The first is the development of our human rights education and training work about which the President has already spoken. We look forward to developing our engagement in this area across Government Departments and with Statutory Bodies and State Agencies over the coming year following the launch of our guide on human rights next month.

2011 will see two major examinations of Ireland's human rights record and the IHRC, as Ireland's National Human Rights Institution, will have a key role to play in both these processes.

The first will be the regular consideration of Ireland's record of compliance with the International Convention for the Elimination of All forms of Racial Discrimination.

The second, which the President has also mentioned, will be the consideration of Ireland under the Universal Periodic Review Process. The IHRC, as an accredited National Human Rights Institution is in a privileged position to engage with this process. Experience has shown that the national institution's report is given considerable weight at the international level.

Our status also gives us unique access to the relevant interlocutors and our engagement is actively supported by a dedicated unit in the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

We intend to use our role to the fullest extent, and to work with the State and civil society and NGOs to ensure the most rigorous and productive process takes place. This is entirely in line with the United Nation's perspective which has repeatedly highlighted the importance of independent national human rights institutions in linking international standards to the national level.

2009 was a year in which we accomplished much. The highly challenging environment in which we carried out our work shows the dedication and commitment which management, staff and Commissioners have to the work of the Commission, and their strong belief in the importance of its independent and impartial role for the promotion and protection of human rights in this country.

Thank you.