

METHODIST CHURCH IN IRELAND
MIDLANDS AND SOUTHERN DISTRICT

AN EAGLAIS MHÓDHACH IN ÉIRINN

The Methodist Church in Ireland - Midlands & Southern District
Synod, Gurteen College, 20 September 2014

Minister Francis Fitzgerald
Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
94 St. Stephen's Green
Dublin 2
23 October 2014

Dear Minister Fitzgerald

I write to you as the District Superintendent of the Midlands and Southern District of the Methodist Church in Ireland.

In the experience of our Church, asylum seekers in the Direct Provision system are one of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in Irish society. Our ministers and members who have first-hand experience with asylum seekers see that the system is one that is inhumane and degrading and that it violates people's human rights, particularly children's rights.

As a church we are very concerned about this state of affairs. The Synod of the Midlands and Southern District (which covers Galway to Athlone to Waterford and all in between) voted unanimously recently that a letter should be written to highlight our concern especially about the following:

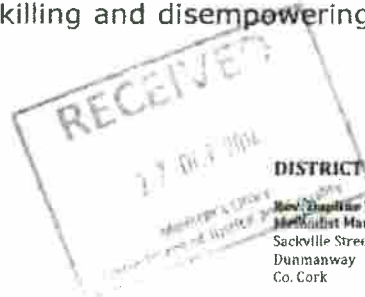
1. the unacceptable length of time spent in Direct Provision by asylum seekers and the deplorably long time it takes to process applications for asylum,
2. the damaging effect of this on the mental and physical wellbeing of both the adults and children at the receiving end of this system,
3. the denial of the right to work for those in the system and the consequent de-skilling and disempowering of many that happens as a result,

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4. the weekly allowance of nineteen euro and fifty cents (€19.50) per adult and nine euro and sixty cents (€9.60) per child which is woefully inadequate to address the financial needs of the recipients who, as a result, do not only find it very difficult to live with dignity but also suffer tremendous stress,
5. the welfare of children who are denied a normal family life and excluded from normal school activities that require funding,
6. the denial to children of the right of meals prepared for them by their parents,
7. the denial to children of the opportunity to integrate in society or engage in ordinary social activities that we all take for granted,
8. the lack of educational opportunities for children living in Direct Provision who are unable to go on to higher level like their Irish peers,
9. and the need for an independent appeals mechanism in hostels, as residents are often fearful of raising their concerns lest such action result in negative consequences with management.

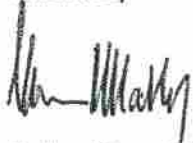
It is our sincere hope that your review committee will speedily address these issues and, thus, end this inhumane and intolerable condition that asylum seekers live under on a daily basis.

These issues, to our mind, are not just about asylum seekers. They are about all of us as well. They are about our own authenticity and integrity. We cannot be telling other people in other countries to uphold the human rights of their people while we abuse the rights of other people here. Not only that, as human beings, any time we dehumanize another human being by our words and actions, we dehumanize the human race of which we are members. And we need to be aware of the fact that the kind of Irish society we want tomorrow cannot wait for tomorrow to be built. We are already building it with the actions we take today.

We sincerely look forward to a speedy and favourable outcome to your review.

On behalf of the Methodist Church in the Republic of Ireland,

Yours sincerely



Bill Mullally (Rev.) District Superintendent, Midlands & Southern District

CC:

Mr. Aodhan O Riordain, Minister of State at the Department of Justice, 94 St. Stephen's Green, Dublin 2

Ms. Jan O'Sullivan, Minister for Education, Marlborough Street, Dublin 1

Reception Integration Agency, 3rd Floor, Bishops Square, Redmond's Hill, Dublin