

Issued by the Irish Traveller Movement

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IRISH TRAVELLER MOVEMENT WELCOMES UN CALL FOR RECOGNITION OF TRAVELLER ETHNICITY

The Irish Traveller Movement (ITM) today (Friday, 25 July) welcomed the call by the United Nations Human Rights Committee for the Irish Government to recognise Travellers as an ethnic minority group.

The recommendation follows the UN Human Rights Committee observations on the Irish Government's third periodic report under the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights.

The Chairperson of the Irish Traveller Movement, Catherine Joyce, welcomed the recommendation, stating that ethnic status is an issue of fundamental importance to Travellers.

"Last month ITM began a petition to lobby Government to formally recognise Traveller ethnicity. Currently, major State Bodies and Human Rights groups such as The Equality Authority, Amnesty International and the National Consultative Committee for Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI) have pledged support to the campaign and agreed to sign the petition.

"The petition will take a number of months to compile and will be submitted together with a Position Paper outlining the rationale and evidence to support the case to the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

"The concluding observations of the UN Human rights Committee, further validates ITM's position. Ethnic status would provide greater protection of Travellers cultural independence under law. This would include official recognition of Traveller culture in the provision of housing, education, health services. For example, nomadism would have to be properly catered for in housing provision.

"It also would have implications in terms of ensuring Traveller representation in the political system. Furthermore, there is also an important symbolic meaning of Traveller Culture becoming validated as both distinct and valued within Irish society."

The Director of ITM, Damien Peelo, stated that the UN observations along with the support of major State and Human Rights groups made a very strong case for the ITM campaign.

"The UN Committee's recommendation in relation to Traveller input in the legislative process is very encouraging. It is essential that where concerning Travellers, Government should ensure that representatives from the Traveller Community are always included public policy initiatives.*

“The Government approach of assimilation in the past, of trying to house and settle Travellers, saw being a Traveller as something essentially negative and had the view that settling Travellers was the solution to the issues.

“However, formal recognition of Travellers’ distinct history, traditions, and culture would bring about greater understanding among the settled community and build confidence and self-esteem among the Traveller community. This would help bridge the gap that has existed for so long between the two communities,” he concluded.

Further Information

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***Extract from the Concluding observations of the Human Rights Committee**

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES, UNDER ARTICLE 40 OF THE COVENANT

IRELAND

23. The Committee is concerned that the State party does not intend to recognize the Traveller community as an ethnic minority. It is furthermore concerned that members of the Traveller community were not represented in the High Level Group on Traveller Issues. The Committee is also concerned about criminalization of trespassing of land in the 2002 Housing Act which disproportionately affects Travellers (art. 26, 27).

The State party should take steps to recognise Travellers as an ethnic minority group. The State party should also ensure that in public policy initiatives concerning Travellers, representatives from the Traveller Community should always be included. It should also amend its legislation to meet the specific accommodation requirements of Traveller families.