

An Taoiseach Brian Cowen T.D.
Department of the Taoiseach
Government Buildings
Upper Merrion Street
Dublin 2

27 August 2009

Dear Taoiseach,

I am writing to you in relation to Ireland's position on ratification of the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). In particular I am writing with regard to the implications of this for people in Ireland who experience mental health problems.

Article 12 of the ICESCR guarantees all people the right to the highest attainable standard of mental health. This includes not just the right to mental health services that are accessible and of good quality but also includes the underlying determinants of mental health such as housing, employment, education and adequate income.

Sadly, this is not the reality in Ireland. Our mental health services are inadequate and unevenly distributed. There is an over-reliance on acute in-patient treatment and these services are consistently reported by the Inspector of Mental Health services as being wholly unsuitable for therapeutic treatment. Furthermore, the levels of social exclusion experienced by people with mental health problems, as set out in the 2007 National Economic and Social Forum report *Mental Health and Social Inclusion*, are quite staggering. Each of these situations is a denial of people's human rights.

Twenty years after Ireland's ratification of the ICESCR, the opening for signature of the Optional Protocol to the ICESCR on 24 September 2009 represents an ideal opportunity for this Irish Government to reaffirm its commitment to the social and economic rights of people in this jurisdiction, and to mark itself out as a human rights leader on the world stage.

I would greatly appreciate a response to the following questions:

- Will the Irish Government sign the Optional Protocol to the ICESCR when it opens for signature on 24 September 2009?
- If not, what is the reason for this and are there plans for signing the Optional Protocol in the future?
- If the Government does sign the Optional Protocol on 24 September will it also ratify on the same day?
- If not, when will the Government ratify the Optional Protocol?

I would appreciate a response to these questions as soon as possible,

Kind Regards