



**Dignity &  
Rights**

A framework  
for the future



## **2014 Dignity & Rights Conference Summary**



So many years on from the Good Friday Agreement, much has been achieved in Northern Ireland. And yet this place is still struggling to come to terms with its past; and respect and working in partnership often seem a distant goal. Human rights at their heart are about human dignity. This can often get forgotten about when focussing on the rules and infrastructure to implement them. That's why this conference in December 2014 focused on Dignity and Rights.

Building on the vision of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that "all human beings are born free and

equal in dignity and rights", the event emphasised the connection between human rights and human beings.

International experts and local leaders helped frame discussions over the course of two days on the core principles of human rights and how to them into practice. Here's what some of them had to say...

Moving forward, the conference was clear that it is even more important in tight financial times that we all work together to ensure that human rights and human dignity are at the heart of decision-making in Northern Ireland.



**“Policing means protecting human rights; human rights are an enabler and are critical to effective, good policing.”**

*Chief Constable George Hamilton*



**“Dialogue about rights is very often about resolving the problems of the people there at the table, at that time. The powerful voices are the ones that get to the table. Participation on the basis of human rights requires you to go beyond the usual suspects, identify the most excluded, and start there to make the change.”**

*Nicola Browne,  
Participation and the Practice of Rights*



**“Rights are to be enjoyed by all without discrimination on any grounds such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.”**

*Jane Connors, Office of the  
UN High Commissioner for Human Rights*



**“When one is asked what is your achievement of the right to food campaign or the work that is happening in India, I don’t think it’s the fact that we have this legislation or these court cases; I think it is the fact that we were able somehow to make people understand that the right to food is central. Make the right to food a part of the national discourse, to get the country talking about it, to make people understand that it is completely unacceptable in today’s day and age that people would go hungry.”**

*Biraj Patnaik,  
India Supreme Court Commissioners*



**"The reality is that many older people face daily challenges which are an attack on their rights and strip away their sense of dignity."**

*Edel Quinn,  
Age NI*



**"We have developed a successful model for change post-Apartheid because South Africans were a bit complacent in trusting that the new democracy would automatically deliver. But our greatest lesson was that it's only when citizens stand up and raise their voices that change happens in the manner that they desire. If they sit in their homes and wait for government to do everything for them they will never realise their dreams."**

*Sindi Blose,  
Treatment Action Campaign (South Africa)*



**“Meaningful accountability is inextricably linked to the idea of practical and effective rights”**

*Les Allamby, Chief Commissioner,  
NI Human Rights Commission*



**“People with a disability have always felt that we were second class citizens and we need to start dealing with that; and as people with disabilities, we need to start saying that we know we are proper citizens, proper people with proper rights, just the same as you.”**

*Monica Wilson,  
Disability Action*



**"The amount paid in benefits is hopelessly inadequate, with the result that many people find themselves robbed of any dignity, in extreme poverty, unable to afford the basics with the result that they must turn to borrowing money which only exacerbates their problems by leaving them in debt. Depriving people of any income for the first week of claiming a benefit is inhumane and cruel."**

*Mary McManus,  
East Belfast Independent Advice Centre*



**"One of the things that Franklin D. Roosevelt said in 1944 when he delivered his state of the union address in which he called for a second Bill of Rights was that people who are hungry and out of a job are the stuff of which dictatorships are made. That is the essence of what we need to be addressing."**

*Mike Posner*

## Participant Responses

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**"We need to promote as widely as possible improved capacity across the sectors to adopt a human rights approach to the way that we conduct our business."**

**"Excellent event – informative and inspiring!"**

**"We need to think creatively and have collective action."**

**"Great conference – stimulating and enjoyable."**

**"We need more joined up action to implement a human rights approach across the community, voluntary, business and public sectors."**

You can read the conference presentations on:  
[add link here]

You can also watch and listen to people talk about why human rights and human dignity are important to them here:  
[add link]



**“All human beings  
are born free  
and equal in  
dignity and rights”**

*Article 1, Universal Declaration of Human Rights*