

challenging religious privilege

1 August 2011

national
secular
society

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Briefing for the examination of Ireland by the Council of Europe Committee of Social Rights under Article 17 of the Social Charter

Dear Mr Shatter

I have intervened three times at the United Nations Human Rights Committee seeking to bring the Catholic Church/Holy See to account over child abuse¹. At the 13th Session of the UN Human Right Council in March, I accused it of breaching six articles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, citing support by Geoffrey Robertson QC, who is also a Distinguished Jurist Member, United Nations Internal Justice Council, 2008-2012.

My work in this area has brought me in contact with a great deal of compromising material relating to Ireland over child abuse. Given what has transpired in Ireland, the most disturbing documents that I have come across are the Government's own submissions to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and, more recently, to the Council of Europe Committee of Social Rights under Article 17 of the Social Charter.

We describe these submissions as "complacent and evasive, accepting no blame for the Government's almost total failure to protect hundreds of thousands of children from abuse over many decades. No mention is made of institutional abuse, far less of major concerns about abuse in Church-controlled institutions."

The above quotation is from Conclusion 5 of our briefing just sent to Council of Europe Committee of Social Rights in connection with its examination of Ireland under Article 17 of the Council's Social Charter. The briefing lists 15 conclusions and 14 recommendations for the Committee, accompanied by extensive appendices showing key extracts from other material, largely reports. The material might otherwise have escaped the Committee's notice as it has only emerged recently or because the material is so voluminous.

Out of courtesy to the Irish Government, we have attached the briefing. We acknowledge, however, that the Government's submissions were either prepared before your Government took over, or before its influence had been brought to bear on those preparing them.

Taoiseach Enda Kenny's speech on 20 July was a proud moment in Ireland's history and we know you will do all in your power to turn the words he spoke into action, and that task will take a great deal of determination and courage. Clearly our briefing was almost complete when the speech was delivered, but we have still submitted it because the material is still correct and the recommendations still valid.

I am happy to answer any questions you have.

¹ <http://www.secularism.org.uk/nss-director-slams-vatican-failu.html>

We look forward to watching the progress you make, working to reverse the many wrongs over child abuse of the last half century or more and making sure they cannot recur.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Keith Porteous Wood". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Keith Porteous Wood
Executive Director