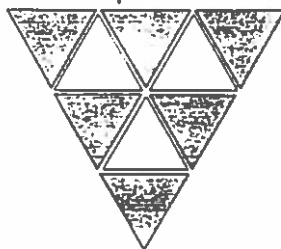


GAY & LESBIAN
EQUALITY NETWORK



AFTER THE PARADE

REPORT BACK 1992

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For presentation to an open meeting of lesbians and gay men in
the Ormond Hotel, Dublin on Saturday 11th April 1992 at 2pm.

1) INTRODUCTION

GLEN was formed in 1988 to be the united voice of all lesbian and gay groups, with a mandate to work for equality in both the criminal and civil law. It is now three and a half years since the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) declared that the Irish anti-gay laws contravene the European Convention on Human Rights. In the one and a half years since GLEN's last *Report Back* (November 1990), we have seen our hopes raised by political commitments to introduce law reform, only to have those promises broken. Yet in many ways this has been a period of significant progress.

We achieved a major step forward in presenting the support for our aims in the launch and development of the **Campaign for Equality**. Asking people to declare publicly their support for our basic - but radical - demands was a strategic success and consolidated the widespread support we have gained.

In the past three months the general political debate on social issues, and the relationship between law and morality, has reached a new pitch. In presenting this report we are aware that we face a strategic problem and difficult tactical decisions, in how to turn the visible sentiment in our favour into legislative action.

2)BROKEN PROMISES

Promises were made

After our last report back meeting in November 1990 we were very encouraged by the debate on the ECHR decision in Seanad Éireann. The debate took place on December 12th 1990. The discussion was of a very high quality and - with the exception of one right wing contribution - there was support for GLEN's aims from all sides of the house. We were particularly pleased by the Minister for Justice's contribution in which he stated:

" If we did not already have legislation which penalises homosexual acts in private between consenting male adults, I do not think that today any reasonable person could seriously argue for such legislation. I assure the house that as early as I can within a year [a gay law reform bill] will be brought forward."

GLEN lobbied senators and supplied information which was used in contributions; a particularly useful item as regards the age of consent was *"Out in Europe"*.

After Mary Robinson's election as President, the then Taoiseach gave commitments to a new broad social agenda at the Fianna Fail Ard Fheis in March 1991 - including a promise of gay law reform. In July in a reply to a Dail question, the Minister for State at the Department of Justice reiterated the commitment to gay law reform by the end of 1991.

.....to be broken

In the Autumn came the first public surfacing of a break in the commitment to law reform as newspapers reported negative comments from Mr. Haughey and Mr. Tunney (Chairman of the Fianna Fáil Parliamentary Party). The initial proposals for the Programme for Government did not mention gay law reform. Following lobbying, there is now a commitment to publish a **Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Bill**

"during the course of the calendar year 1992 .. and process [it] as speedily as possible".

On the 4th February 1992 in a written answer the then Minister for Justice said:

"Work is progressing on the preparation of this legislation as quickly as other urgent legislative priorities and available resources permit. The recent review of the Programme for Government reaffirmed the commitment to bring forward legislation to comply with the judgement of the European Court of Human Rights in this case. I hope to publish my proposals later this year".

On 20th November 1991 GLEN lodged complaints with the ECHR, Council of Europe, and the Human Rights Committee of the United Nations, quoting the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) concern at this:

"inordinate delay [which] shows little regard for the status of the European Convention of Human Rights and the commitment of the Irish Government to abide by its provisions".

The GLEN letter concluded

"we believe that this three year delay and the ongoing confusion and uncertainty is an unacceptable response to a ruling of the European Court of Human Rights".

Pressure points

Every six months the Government must account for its progress in implementing the Court's decision at the Committee of Ministers Deputies (Council of Europe). The Nordic countries in particular are pressing for action by the Irish Government - this is our greatest leverage. A priority therefore, in advance of the Committee's next meeting in June, will be to lobby the countries represented in the Council of Europe using our contacts in the International Lesbian & Gay Association (ILGA). *Ultimately the only reason the Government will implement law reform is the fear that the Council will declare Ireland to have denounced the European Convention of Human Rights.*

Other ways of pressurising the Government are:

- a private members Bill;
- questions in the Dail and Seanad;
- TV and general media coverage;
- further lobbying, etc.

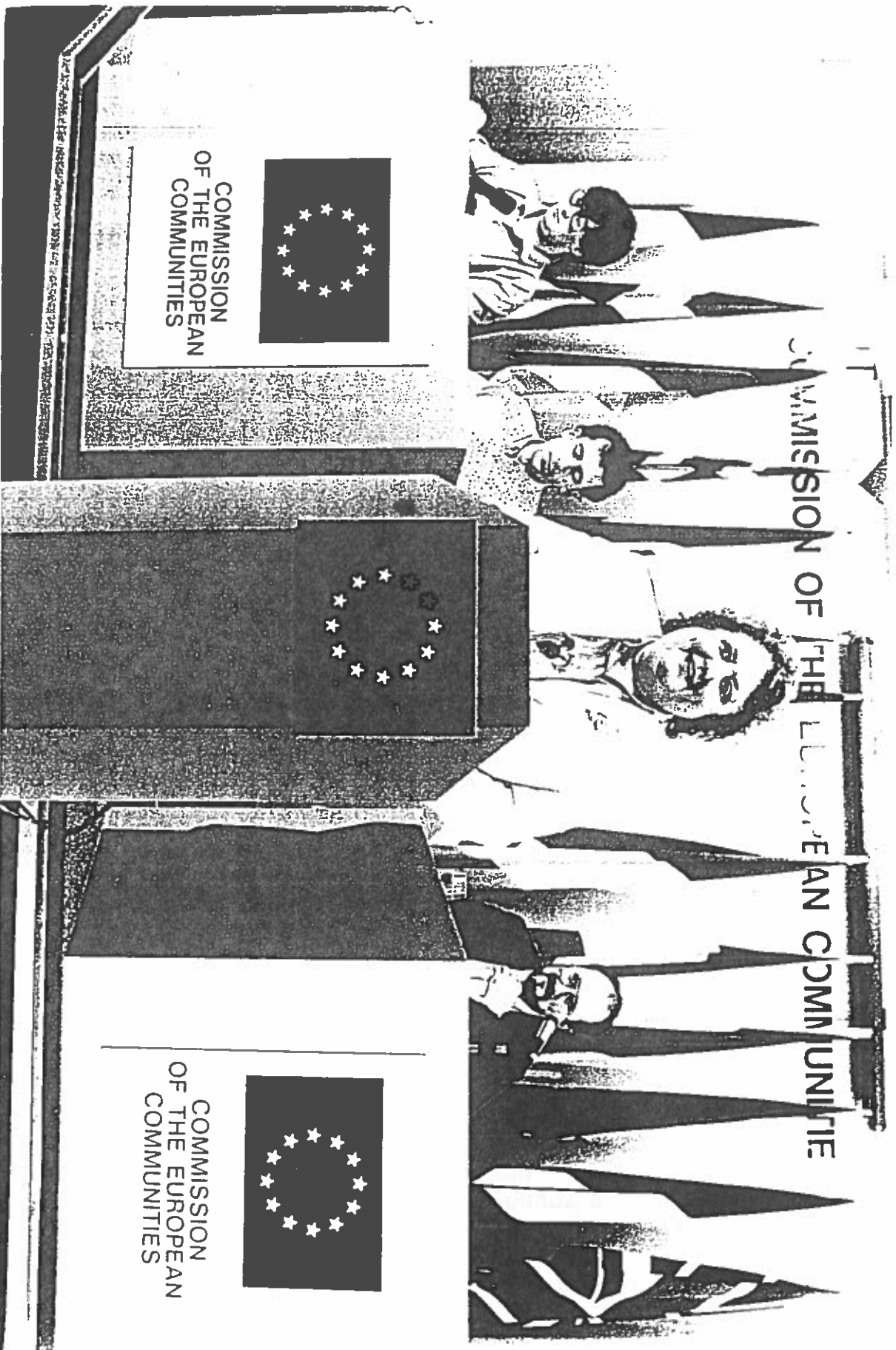
GLEN has sought meetings with An Taoiseach and the Ministers for Justice and Foreign affairs. Possible optimistic signs have been recent comments by An Taoiseach and some of his ministers - but the experiences of the past year have taught us to be wary.

3) CAMPAIGN FOR EQUALITY

This innovation was the main achievement of the past eighteen months. It provides a simple mechanism for the public declaration of support of our main aims. The Campaign launch, at the European Communities offices, was a major success with speakers including:

- Monica Barnes TD, Chairwoman, Joint Oireachtas Committee on Women's Rights
- Patricia O'Donovan, Assistant General Secretary, ICTU
- Sylvia Meehan, Chief Executive, Employment Equality Agency
- Roger Garland TD, Green Party,

and representatives of the Dublin Travellers Education and Development Group. Forum of People with Disabilities, Labour



(Photo: AP/RN)

Monica Barnes, Chairwoman of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Women's Rights, speaking at the launch of the Campaign for Equality in the European Communities Office, October 1991. Back (L to R): Margaret McWilliam, Co-chair, GLEN and LEN; Kieran Rose and Chris Robson, both Co-chairs GLEN.

Party, Council for the Status of Women, and Young Fine Gael among others.

Endorsements to date cover a wide spectrum of Irish society. With little extra energy and work the list of endorsees could be greatly expanded and used for publicity, etc.

4) ANTI-DISCRIMINATION

There is a growing awareness of the need for anti-discrimination legislation. The Labour Party's **Equal Status Bill** is an example; debated in the Dail on 25th March, it was supported by all the Opposition and lost 63 to 67. This is an historic vote - the first time anti-discrimination legislation was introduced in the Dail which included sexual orientation and got substantial support. The Bill is modelled on the Ontario Human Rights legislation which was forwarded to the Labour Party by GLEN as part of the lobbying process.

Developments in the employment area have also been encouraging. The **Unfair Dismissals Act** is currently being reviewed by the Government and a Bill is expected before the end of April. At this stage sexual orientation is neither "*included nor excluded*". At present GLEN is involved in a final push for its inclusion and we have sought an urgent meeting with the Minister for Labour.

The inclusion of sexual orientation in employment legislation is a vital part of GLEN's aims. Since the early 1980s it has been a major area of work for activists. Greater security of employment would be of incalculable importance to our communities; a defeat would be a major setback. Recently we have had a positive response from the Federation of Irish Employers (FIE) and the continued support of the ICTU; we remain hopeful of a positive outcome.

The Employment Equality Agency (EEA) now welcomes cases of discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and this is a very practical support. We look forward to the inclusion of sexual orientation in the amendments due to the **Employment Equality Act**, which would give a statutory basis to positive action by the Agency. Lobbying on this issue will be an important area of work.

In March we made a detailed submission to the Anti-discrimination Sub-committee of the National AIDS Strategy Committee.

5) POLITICAL LOBBYING

Among the formal meetings we had were with:

- John Bruton TD, Leader of the Opposition and Fine Gael
- Sean Barrett TD, then Fine Gael Shadow Spokesperson on Justice
- Michael Bell TD, Labour Party Spokesperson on Justice
- Sen. Helen Keogh, Progressive Democrats
- Prionsais De Rossa TD, then Leader of the Workers' Party

We met representatives of Dublin Ogra Fianna Fáil who were preparing a policy statement on gay law reform; the policy, once adopted, is expected to be published before the end of April.

The political picture looks positive:

- The Progressive Democrats welcomed the Law Reform Commission's proposals.
- Fine Gael has stated its support for anti-discrimination legislation and amendments to the Unfair Dismissals And Employment Equality Acts.
- The Labour Party]
- The Green Party]have endorsed the **Campaign for**
- The Workers' Party] **Equality.**

We participated in a survey of MEPs organised by ILGA. In March 1992 GLEN affiliated to the *Repeal the 8th Amendment Campaign*, and endorsed the *Condom Sense* campaign.

6) RELIGIOUS LOBBYING

In September 1991 GLEN wrote to all the organised religions in Ireland. We were heartened by the response of the **Church of Ireland**; Dr. Eames confirmed that :

"the Church has expressed its approval that the law should not take cognisance of homosexual practice by consenting adults"and he stated their support for amendments on sexual orientation to the Unfair Dismissals and Employment Acts.

The responses of the Society of Friends (Quakers) and the Dublin Jewish Progressive Congregation have also been positive.

The recent revival of the abortion debate has given rise to a new awareness of the need to distinguish between law and morality. This debate could help clarify the issues involved in gay law reform. Work in this area could be very constructive; we need to consider how best to do this.

7) PUBLICITY/LIAISON/PUBLICATIONS

In February and March 1991 there were several prominent features on lesbian and gay life in Ireland in the national papers. In May the Irish Times printed an article written by Family Solidarity. GLEN's response was published in July, and a debate followed in the Letters Page.

For Lesbian/Gay Pride Week 1991 we organized a successful meeting which was addressed by Emily O'Reilly, political correspondent of the Irish Press; Fintan O'Toole, columnist with the Irish Times; and Christine Donnaghy, Irish Family Planning Association.

In February 1991 we held an open meeting in the City Centre. Mary Holland was the guest speaker and two workshops - on "Lesbians & law reform" and "Young lesbians and gay men & law reform" - followed.

We co-organized with Trinity Gaysoc a meeting/press conference around the visit of Peter Tatchell to Dublin in late 1991. His complaint to the European Commission and comments on the Council of Europe are of interest.

We produced a listing of anti-discrimination material from Australia in January and distributed it widely; there have been several requests for further information.

Gay Community News has been a vital element in our liaison with the lesbian and gay communities; with the April 1992 edition we have begun a regular column reporting on our activities. We wish to thank *GCN* for its support.

GLEN has met many requests for speakers eg Reach, UCD Gaysoc, University of Limerick Gaysoc, UCC Law Society.

With this *Report Back 1992* we are launching new briefing documents: a listing of material relating to lesbian/gay law reform, a selection of quotations, and a chronology.

Other activities have included the launch of the Campaign for Equality (Section 3); responding to Family Solidarity's opinion poll; and participating in an Irish language television documentary on gay life - to be broadcast before the end of June.

8) IRISH COUNCIL FOR CIVIL LIBERTIES (ICCL)

Continued support has come from the ICCL. Chris Robson, Co-chair of GLEN, was elected to their Executive. A copy of "*Equality Now* " was sent to all members of the Oireachtas by the ICCL last year.

The ICCL are currently working with the DTEDG on a proposal for anti-discrimination legislation to protect Travellers; we are liaising with them and supporting this work.

9) INTERNATIONAL

We organised a press conference in early March where Anne and Catch from Irish Lesbian and Gay Organization (ILGO) launched our boycott of Guinness and called on the Irish Government not to send representatives to the St. Patrick's Day Parade in New York. We wrote to the Ministers for Foreign Affairs, and for Tourism.

In response Monica Barnes of the Oireachtas Committee on Women's Rights and the Council for the Status of Women sent letters of protest. We held a successful picket of Bord Failte on 14th March.

It is our intention that there should be an application to take part in next year's St. Patrick's Day Parade in Dublin.

Police repression in the Isle of Man caused urgent concern in March also. GLEN liaised with activists there and sent letters of protest and support. On the 31st March 1992 the House of Keys passed the Sexual Offences Bill 1990 decriminalising homosexuality.

The support of the **International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA)** continues to be of vital importance. Regrettably, due to lack of finance, we were unable to send representatives to either the Annual Conference in Mexico or the European Regional Conference in Berlin during 1991. Instead we sent written reports, and requests for action; already several organizations have responded by writing to An Taoiseach.

GLEN played a key role in the ILGA lobby of **Amnesty International (AI)** to get them to adopt lesbians and gay men as prisoners of conscience. The Irish Section of Amnesty played a central role in achieving this change at the AI international council meeting in Autumn 1991.

GLEN undertook to organize a survey of the rights of lesbian and gay workers at the 1989 Annual Conference of ILGA. Last year we obtained funding from IMPACT, drew up the questionnaire, and distributed it. Part of our work in the months ahead is to follow up on the replies received and prepare a report for ILGA Annual Conference in Paris in June.

Reference has been made already to the complaint to the Council of Europe and the UN (Section 2).

10) SOCIAL WELFARE

GLEN was represented at the conference on "*The Voluntary Sector and the State*" in February 1992. We made a submission to the Department of Social Welfare and the Community Workers' Co-op

on the "Charter for the Voluntary Social Services Sector ". We stressed that there is discrimination against lesbians and gay men, and our organisations, by both the voluntary and statutory agencies

In March 1992 GLEN submitted a proposal to **Combat Poverty**; its title: "Project Proposal:Poverty and Lesbians & Gay Men". The study outlined would focus on:

"1. The potential vulnerability of all lesbians and gay men to poverty due to discrimination.

2. The further marginalisation of lesbians and gay men who may already be living in poverty due to, inter alia, discrimination in terms of social welfare, services,...accommodation or employment, if their sexual orientation is known'

The Research Sub-committee of Combat Poverty refused the application. Under the circumstances it appears to be a clear case of discrimination. We are seeking an urgent meeting with the Director, Mr. Hugh Frazer, to impress on him the need for the Agency to resolve the problem.

GLEN will be seeking meetings with the Ministers for Health, and Social Welfare.

11) LESBIAN EQUALITY NETWORK (LEN)

The major development in the lesbian community was the formation of **Lesbians Organizing Together (LOT)**. The Lesbian Equality Network (LEN) is a founding and active member; GLEN made a donation of £100 toward start-up costs.

The publication in March 1992 of "*Law Reform: the issues for lesbians* " by the Lesbian Education Group, under the auspices of LOT, is very important. As lesbians and gay men we need to continually address the needs, and role, of lesbians in the struggle for law reform.

LEN's involvement in the Council for the Status of Women (CSW) has been vital in obtaining that organization's support for our initiatives. The successful CSW workshop on homophobia last year was a major achievement.

30 of the 35 people who marched with the Munster Lesbian & Gay Collective in the Cork St. Patrick's Day Parade were lesbians.

12) YOUNG GLEN

The founding of the **Lesbian and Gay Youth Federation of Ireland (LGYFI)** in 1991 was a great achievement in itself, and will be a resource for the future.

The LGYFI's request to the National Youth Council of Ireland to support gay law reform was successful. In July 1991 the NYCI wrote to the Minister for Justice that:

" The National Youth Council of Ireland would favour an ending of the present anomalous situation which discriminates against young homosexuals and which contravenes the European Convention on Human Rights."

The LGYFI have recently produced a detailed report on their first year of operation...

13) FINANCE

GLEN continues to be underfunded. At present we have £37 on hands at the bank. Our monthly loan repayment of £90 is covered by standing orders from a few generous individuals.

We depend on fundraising and occasional donations for our running expenses. Our **Tea Dance** last September was well supported and raised £700; this money has funded our activities since then. We thank the Youth Group and the many others, without whose help this fundraiser would not have been success. We need £500 - £1,000 urgently, to fund our work for the coming period.

Below is a summarised cash analysis for 1989 -1991:

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>TOTAL INCOME</u>	<u>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</u>
1989	£ 572.03	£ 399.00
1990	£4,862.90	£4,260.21
1991	£1,996.46	£2,540.57

In 1990 we raised a £3,000 bank loan (with personal guarantees). This was used to finance the purchase of an Apple Mac which cost us £1,963. A summarised breakdown of expenditure follows:

TYPE	1989	1990	1991
Meetings	£ 52	£ 325.00	£ 443.80
Books purchased		£ 159.63	£ 226.00
PC purchase		£1,963.00	
PC/Loan repay.		£ 720.84	£1,081.44
Memb'ps/ILGA Conf.		£ 616.13	£ 304.91
Photocopying		£ 75.00	£ 159.06
Printing	£335	£ 142.27	£ 119.28
Postage		£ 147.34	£ 97.43
Administration	£ 12	£ 111.00	£ 108.65
TOTAL	£399	£4,260.21	£2,540.57

As the figures above show we have achieved a great deal with very little finance; GLEN is good value for money! This would not have been possible without the support, and office facilities, provided by the National Lesbian & Gay Federation (NLGF) and Nexus Research Europe; for which we thank them.

We also thank the many individuals (within and without the lesbian and gay communities) whose support - financial and otherwise - and advice, have been vital for our work.

GLEN is totally dependent on donations to fund our work. Attached to this report is a bank standing order form for our account; your contribution, by this or any other method, would be much appreciated.

14) CONCLUSION

"What was the outcome of the St. Patrick's Day venture? Have we come any further in our struggle? One concrete result of the parade was quite a negative one - it exposed our vulnerability to abuse. Despite the wonderful triumph we achieved on the day, we must face up to the reality that, in Cork, we continue to face violence, harassment, and discrimination at work and under the law"

Petra Stone, Munster GCN, April 1992

Building on almost twenty years of lesbian and gay activism in Ireland, GLEN has - over the past three years - clarified three of the four main questions facing us.

We know **WHAT** we want:-

- a) to get the implementation of the Law Reform Commission's recommendations on homosexual law reform; and
- b) to get anti-discrimination legislation on the statute books - this includes amending any relevant standing laws eg Unfair Dismissals Act, Employment Equality Act.

We know **WHY** we want these changes: the quote from Petra in Cork says it eloquently.

We know **WHO** we want to make these changes: the Irish Legislature.

Now we need to find an effective way **HOW** we can achieve these changes. This report has tried to outline the background to these decisions.

We have built general support for our aims and demonstrated this support through the Campaign for Equality. We have obtained promises of action from senior politicians only to see those promises broken.

We believe that *Ultimately the only reason the Government will implement law reform is the fear that the Council will declare Ireland to have denounced the European Convention of Human Rights.* We must focus our work accordingly.

11th April 1992.

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