



The ESC Rights Initiative

Promoting constitutional protection of economic, social and cultural rights

Press Briefing on the ESC Rights Initiative Conference

Making Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Meaningful

29 March 2017, 10.30am-3.30pm, Oak Room, Mansion House, Dawson Street, Dublin 2.

In order to advance our objectives, the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Initiative will hold a high-level event entitled *Making Economic Social and Cultural Rights Meaningful* on 29th March 2017.

This event will bring together politicians, the legal profession and civil society to consider enforceability and accountability mechanisms for ESC rights at national, regional and international level and the need to enhance the protection thereof. The event will consider why enforceable ESC rights are important and the real and practical difference this could make to individuals and groups in Ireland.

Drawing on the recent findings of the European Committee on Social Rights against Ireland, discussions will consider the accountability mechanisms already available, how these can be utilised and how accountability can be strengthened. The event will discuss how enforceable ESC rights such as housing and health would impact upon individuals and groups in Ireland, drawing on experiences from other European States where ESC rights have been given legal protection.

The objectives of this event are:

- To bring together law and policy makers, politicians, members of the legal profession, civil society and other stakeholders to discuss enforceability and accountability on ESC rights, how this can be advanced in Ireland and the difference it would make in practical terms.
- To achieve greater understanding of ESC rights among participants.
- To create political debate and a willingness amongst law and policy makers to advance the strengthening of ESC rights in Ireland.

Jamie Burton, Public Lawyer of Doughty Street Chambers will be the keynote speaker at this event. Burton is a public lawyer with expertise in judicial review and human rights and has sat on UNICEF's Expert Group on the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child and assisted in drafting its landmark 2012 report on domestic incorporation of the Convention.

Note on the context

- Economic, social and cultural (ESC) rights are those human rights relating to issues of poverty, health, housing, education, employment conditions and participation in cultural life. ESC rights compel governments to *progressively realise* an adequate standard of living for everybody, including appropriate shelter and sanitation, access to proper healthcare, adequate nutrition, social security, and protections within the workplace. Along with the civil and political rights they are part of the international body of human rights as set down in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

- Ireland is a signatory to both the International Covenant on Civil & Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights but only civil and political rights are firmly embedded in the constitution and are justiciable, resulting in a situation where there is no compulsion on the state to *progressively realise* both sets of rights as set down in Covenants.

This has brought criticism from the UN examining committees and the UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty.

- The ESC Rights Initiative is a coalition of organisations campaigning to ensure that ESC rights, already adopted and ratified by Ireland through the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, be set down in an amended Constitution, a Bill of Rights or a Charter of Rights, and that those rights are justiciable.

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