



PAVEE POINT
TRAVELLER AND ROMA CENTRE

Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice and Equality

9th November 2016

Presentation by Martin Collins.

Chairperson, Deputies and Senators, from the outset we want to convey our disappointment and frustration that this state continues to deny us our ethnicity and identity, however, we do hope that the work and the interest shown by this committee will give added impetus and encourage the government to show political leadership and to unequivocally, through the Taoiseach, make a declaration to the Dáil and the country that this state recognises the distinct ethnic identity of my community. The persistent refusal of this state to recognise Traveller identity is untenable and diminishes our standing in the international community.

Pavee Point Traveller & Roma Centre has been advocating and campaigning for over 30 years that the Traveller community constitute an ethnic minority and should be recognised as such. We have the support of many academics; we also have the support of many international human rights monitoring bodies such as ICESCR and CERD, and in an Irish context we have the

support of the Irish Human Rights Equality Commission and your predecessor, the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice & Equality. We also know that the Attorney General's Office has advised that there is no cost or legal implications to recognising Traveller ethnicity. A body of evidence has provided, legal, sociological and anthropological, which conclusively confirms that we Travellers do constitute an ethnic group.

The recognition of Travellers as an ethnic minority is not some abstract, ideological debate. The recognition of Traveller ethnicity is fundamentally a human rights issue. It has implications for policy development and service provision as my colleague, Ronnie, will outline in a moment or two.

The acknowledgement of our ethnicity would send out a very powerful and symbolic message, a message that's about respect, inclusion and recognition, validating our history, our culture and our language. It's not as some would say to make you less Irish, there's no conflict between nationality and ethnicity, I'm very proud of my Irish-ness but I'm equally as proud of my Traveller identity.

Recognition would have a powerful impact on our collective self-esteem, confidence and status in Irish society.

It is my strong belief that in the absence of this recognition, the sub text to the narrative continues to be one of viewing my community as dysfunctional and primitive, a people who need to be rehabilitated and

civilized. This can lead to internalized oppression, shame, low self-esteem, depression and suicide.

In conclusion, in May of 2015 the government and the people of Ireland showed great leadership, courage and generosity by amending our constitution to allow for same sex marriage. We, here today are asking for that same leadership, courage and generosity to be extended to our community.