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Welcome to the autumn 2019 newsletter from Senator Ivana Bacik. I was honoured to be re-elected in April 2016 to represent Dublin University graduates in Seanad Éireann. I will make sure to keep you up to date with the work that I am doing in the Seanad, and would be happy to raise issues there on your behalf.

Ivana



With Speaker Nancy Pelosi at her visit to the Houses of the Oireachtas as part of Dáil100, April 2019

Legislative Achievements in the Seanad

Since my first election in 2007, I have had six private member's bills accepted by Government; four of which have become law. The four which have become law already are: (1) Criminal Justice (Female Genital Mutilation) Act 2012, which for the first time created a specific offence of FGM; (2) Civil Registration (Amendment) Act 2012, which enables non-religious solemnisers like those from the Humanist Association of Ireland to conduct legal wedding ceremonies; (3) Equality (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2015, which amends section 37 of the Employment Equality Act to prohibit discrimination against LGBT teachers or hospital workers; and (4) Competition (Amendment) Act 2017, which provides collective bargaining rights to vulnerable self-employed workers like freelance journalists, actors and musicians. This was developed in conjunction with trade unions including NUJ, Equity and SIPTU, and was the first private member's bill to become law since the general election 2016.

Gender Pay Gap Legislation

In September 2018, the Gender Pay Gap bill that I had introduced in the Seanad in May 2017 was passed through the Seanad. Labour TDs tabled the Bill before the Dáil where it passed Second Stage on 3 October 2018. My bill would require all companies with 50 or more staff to publish anonymised data showing pay levels and gender breakdown in their organisations, in order to see if a gender pay gap exists. The bill would then empower the Human Rights and Equality Commission to take action against companies which pay men more than women. Overall, women in Ireland earn on average 14% less than men. Laws that require wage transparency have reduced the gap between the earnings of women and men in other countries. The government have now introduced their own legislation to tackle the gender pay gap, currently before the Oireachtas – if passed, it will mean that we can finally have transparency on the real gender pay gap in Ireland.



With other speakers at TCD Law School/Arthur Cox Employment Law update, June 2019

Oireachtas Foreign Affairs Committee

I have been very active in my role as Labour representative on the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs. Among other initiatives, I have continued to raise the ongoing conflict in Syria at every opportunity. On 5th March 2019, our Committee heard representatives from Concern, Trócaire and GOAL speak about the refugee situation in Syria and related matters. In April 2019, we heard from Jim Clarken of Oxfam Ireland and from Dina El-Mamoun, Oxfam's International's Head of Policy and Advocacy, speaking on the world's worst humanitarian crisis in Yemen. We also heard from Trade Unionists in Colombia, about the situation they are facing. More recently I raised human rights concerns in Bahrain, and the ongoing conflict in Syria with the Tánaiste Simon Coveney, when he appeared before the Committee, on 3 October 2019.



I was delighted to speak at the South Kilkenny Historical Society in Mullinavat, 26 September 2019 about my family's links to the area, and in particular my grandfather's role in re-establishing Waterford Glass



Pictured with other members of the Committee of Foreign Affairs, and international trade unionists, at a meeting on the Colombian Peace Process, 11 July 2019

WOMEN IN LAW



I was delighted to speak at the launch of the first student-led women in law initiative at Trinity College Dublin, along with Judge Mary Finlay Geoghegan, 30 September 2019

WOMEN'S CAUCUS

I am proud to be on the Executive of the Oireachtas Women's Caucus (chaired by Catherine Martin TD), which was established in 2016. Among our other achievements, we held

a very successful international conference of women's caucuses in Dublin Castle in September 2018, attended by women parliamentarians from across the world. In March 2019, we put forward a cross-party motion in both Dáil and Seanad on Period Poverty, drawing attention to the very serious implications of period poverty for girls and women, both in Ireland and internationally. Drawing on the brilliant work of NGOs like Homeless Period and Plan International, we raised awareness about the lack of affordability of sanitary products; and also challenged the taboo traditionally impeding public discourse about women's menstruation.



With members of the all-party Oireachtas Women's Caucus, 10 October 2019

Human Trafficking and Prostitution



Speaking at the House of Commons Inquiry chaired by Frank Field MP, 3 September 2019

In March 2019, I spoke to mark the second anniversary of the introduction of Part 4 of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017 which criminalised the purchase of sexual services, at the launch by the Immigrant Council of Ireland of the cross-jurisdictional ASSIST programme, funded under the EU Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund.

At the launch, I emphasised that the 2017 law reform is based on an understanding of prostitution itself as an exploitative 'gender regime'. I will be working with a group of Oireachtas members, NGOs and others to promote the 2017 law reform and highlight its importance in tackling demand for prostitution.



With Professor Catharine MacKinnon at the Worldwide #MeToo Movement Conference on Global Resistance to Sexual Harassment at the University of California, Berkeley, at which I was a speaker, May 2019



With Judge Catherine McGuinness, former President Mary McAleese, and Martin McAleese, Hibernian Law Society Event which I chaired, March 2019



With national Together for Yes spokespersons Grainne Griffin, Orla O'Connor and Ailbhe Smyth, November 2018

Repeal of the Eighth Amendment

Following the historic 66.4% majority vote to repeal the Eighth Amendment on 25th May 2018, we have finally been able to reform our abortion laws and provide women in Ireland with access to the reproductive healthcare we need.

The Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Bill 2018, which provides access to legal abortion in Ireland, passed final stage in the Seanad on 13 December 2018. Abortion services have been available in Ireland now since 1st January 2019.

However, during the debates on the legislation, many of us warned about the risk of protests outside abortion service providers and called for new law on 'exclusion zones' outside clinics and hospitals. Statutory exclusion zones protecting those who seek access to abortion services are in effect already in other countries, including Australia and the US.

I will continue to work to ensure that women have safe access to reproductive healthcare services.

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