



**Public interest law in action –  
using the law to face  
current challenges**

**Conference Programme**

16 April 2009,  
Radisson BLU Royal Hotel,  
Golden Lane,  
Dublin 8

- 8.45am Registration and tea/coffee
- 9.30am **Opening address**  
Peter Ward SC, Chairperson, FLAC
- 9.45am **The Stolen Generations – the legacy of Indigenous Australians forcibly removed from their families: a case study of the value and limitations of law and the potential of public interest law**  
Andrea Durbach, Director, Australian Human Rights Centre, University of New South Wales
- 10.15am **Constructing Public Interest Law in Central and Eastern Europe: why and how? Then and now**  
Edwin Rekosh, Executive Director, Public Interest Law Institute
- 10.45am Q&A
- 11.00am Tea/coffee break
- 11.15am **Introduction by Chairperson**  
Colin Daly, Managing Solicitor, Northside Community Law Centre
- 11.20am **Public interest law in a changing climate: the Republic of Ireland**  
Michael Farrell, Senior Solicitor, FLAC
- 11.35am **PILA's role in public interest law in the Republic of Ireland**  
Jo Kenny, Legal Officer, PILA
- 11.50am **Public interest law: a Northern Ireland perspective**  
Paul Mageean, Chair of Board, Public Interest Litigation Support Project, Belfast
- 12.05pm **Development of the PILS Project**  
Melissa Murray, Project manager and Solicitor,  
Public Interest Litigation Support Project, Belfast
- 12.20pm Q&A
- 12.45pm Lunch

## W O R K S H O P S

There will be **four workshops** running in parallel. The aim of each workshop is to highlight practical recent examples of ways that the law has and is being used in the public interest. The workshops will be on:

**CHILDREN**

Speakers: **Paddy Kelly**, Director, Children's Law Centre Northern Ireland  
**Geoffrey Shannon**, Solicitor and Government's special rapporteur on Child Protection  
Facilitator: **Tony O'Riordan**, PILA

12.55pm

Lunchtime event:

**Conversation with Andrea Durbach and Mary Fitzgerald**

This public interview is supported by FOMACS (Forum on Migration and Communications) and the British Council, in the context of a new collaborative public education project, titled *Learning Lab: Identities and Social Justice*.

2pm

**Parallel workshops:**

- Children;
- Debt;
- Housing;
- Social welfare.

3.15pm

Tea/coffee break

3.30pm

**Interview session**

The purpose of this session is to provide a forum for a discussion on international and national public interest law in practice.

This session will be hosted by broadcaster Vincent Browne.

Participating on the interview panel will be:

- ▼ **Mark O'Brien**,  
Executive Director, ProBono.Net;
- ▼ **Clarissa O'Callaghan**,  
Head of pro bono, Freshfields Bruckhaus, Deringer, London;
- ▼ **John Smelcer, Associate**,  
Latham & Watkins, London; and
- ▼ **Donncha O'Connell**,  
Visiting Senior Fellow at the Centre for the Study of Human Rights, LSE and  
Lecturer at the School of Law, NUI Galway.

4.30pm

**Concluding remarks**

Noeline Blackwell, Director General, FLAC

4.45pm

Conference reception

**DEBT**

Speakers: **Colin Daly**, Managing Solicitor  
Northside Community Law Centre

**Paul Joyce**, Senior Policy Researcher, FLAC  
Facilitator: Edel Quinn, PILA

**HOUSING**

Speakers: **Siobhan Cummiskey**, Solicitor, Irish  
Traveller Movement Law Centre

**Clare Naughton**, Solicitor, Northside  
Community Law Centre  
Facilitator: Lianne Murphy, PILA

**SOCIAL WELFARE**

Speakers: **Saoirse Brady**,  
Campaigns and Policy Officer, FLAC  
**Moya de Paor**, Solicitor,  
Northside Community Law Centre  
Facilitator: Jo Kenny, PILA

# Biographies

**Vincent Browne** is a writer, broadcaster and journalist who is also a barrister. He has forty years of experience in print journalism and editing and has been a broadcaster on RTÉ radio. He is co-founder and co-editor of Politico.ie, a current affairs news site and blog. He presents the political discussion programme, *Tonight with Vincent Browne*, on TV3 from Monday to Thursday weekly.

**Andrea Durbach** is the Director of the Australian Human Rights Centre, University of New South Wales in Australia. She is best known for her public interest law work in South Africa, her home country. Her book 'Uppington' (2002) reflects on her experience of when she was appointed solicitor in 1988 to 25 black defendants in a notorious death penalty case in South Africa. Andrea's research and teaching focuses on access to justice and public interest litigation; the implementation of economic, social and cultural rights, with a particular focus on health; facilitating reparations for Indigenous victims of Australia's forced removal and assimilation policies (the Stolen Generations); and the role and impact of national human rights institutions in the Asia Pacific region.

**Michael Farrell** has been the senior solicitor with FLAC since 2005. He has been a member of the Irish Human Rights Commission since it was established in 2001. He is a member of the Human Rights Committee of the Law Society of Ireland and is a former Co-Chairperson of the Irish Council for Civil Liberties. Prior to joining FLAC, he was a solicitor in private practice, working in the areas of criminal and civil litigation. He has taken cases to the UN Human Rights Committee under the ICCPR and to the European Court of Human Rights and the European Committee of Social Rights.

**Mary Fitzgerald** is the *Irish Times*' foreign affairs correspondent. Awarded the Laurence Stern Fellowship at the *Washington Post*, she covered the 2004 US presidential election for that paper before moving to Jordan. She has worked across the Middle East, Africa and South Asia. In 2006, she spent five months reporting on Islam in Egypt, Jordan, Pakistan and Turkey for the *Irish Times* after she was awarded the inaugural Douglas Gageby Fellowship.

**Jo Kenny** joined the Public Interest Law Alliance as Legal Officer in 2009. Jo qualified as a barrister in England (Lincoln's Inn). She worked as a legal advisor to the UK Department for Work and Pensions for 3 years, where she advised on domestic and international litigation and the ECHR and EU aspects of policy proposals and legislation. On returning to Dublin, Jo worked as an associate at Arthur Cox for 2 years and co-authored the pensions chapter in 'Employment Law' by Maeve Regan, Tottels.

**Melissa Murray** graduated from Trinity College, Dublin in 2003 with an LLB (Hons) in Law and obtained her professional qualification from the Institute of Professional Legal Studies in 2005. She completed her apprenticeship with Sheridan & Leonard Solicitors in Belfast and upon receiving her formal qualification joined their criminal department. She left Sheridan & Leonard in April 2009 to join the Public Interest Litigation Support Project, known as the PILS Project, where she is now Project Manager and Solicitor.

**Paul Mageean** is the Director of the Graduate School for Professional Legal Education at the University of Ulster. He qualified as a solicitor in 1991 and spent almost five years in private practice with P.J. McGrory & Co. in Belfast. In 1995 Paul joined the Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ) as their Legal Officer. During his time at CAJ, Paul successfully brought a number of cases to the European Court of Human Rights including the landmark cases of Kelly v UK and Shanaghan v UK. Paul joined the Court Service as Head of the Criminal Justice Secretariat in 2004. Before taking up his current appointment, he spent three years with Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland, which has a statutory remit to inspect the criminal justice agencies. He has also been involved in extensive human rights training, particularly in the Middle East.

**Mark O'Brien** is the co-founder and Executive Director of ProBono.Net, a US non-profit organisation dedicated to increasing access to justice for low income individuals. Through innovative technology solutions and expertise in building and mobilising justice networks, ProBono.Net works to transform and advance the way legal aid reaches underserved communities. Prior to founding ProBono.Net, Mark directed the pro bono programme at Davis Polk & Wardwell from 1992 to 1999. During his tenure, both he and the firm won numerous awards for contribution to pro bono issues.

**Clarissa O'Callaghan** is global head of Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer's pro bono programme. The pro bono programme is core part of the firm's CSR activities and focuses on human rights, access to justice, homelessness and disadvantaged young people. Clarissa is a practising solicitor, having qualified into Freshfield's litigation department in 2004 and has worked on cases before the European Court of Human Rights and on death penalty and clemency cases in the US. She sits on the executive committee of the Human Rights Lawyers Association.

**Donncha O'Connell** is currently a Visiting Senior Fellow at the Centre for the Study of Human Rights, LSE. He is on sabbatical from the School of Law, NUI Galway where he teaches Constitutional Law, European Human Rights, Processes of Law Reform and Equality Law: Principles & Thematic Application. He was Dean of Law at NUI Galway from 2005-2008. Donncha is the Senior Irish member of FRALEX, the legal expert group that advises the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights based in Vienna and was, from 2002-2006, the Irish member of the EU Network of Independent Experts on Fundamental Rights.

**Edwin Rekosh** is the founder and Executive Director of the Public Interest Law Institute (PILI), an international NGO with offices in Beijing, Budapest, Moscow and New York that advances human rights around the world by stimulating public interest advocacy and developing the institutions necessary to sustain it. Currently based in New York, he has lived in Romania and Hungary for a total of 10 years, and has worked in over two dozen countries. Ed teaches Human Rights, Law and Development at Columbia University School of Law, and he received the American Bar Association's International Human Rights Award in 2009.

**John Smelcer** is an Associate at the London office of Latham & Watkins, where he actively participates in the firm's pro bono program, representing international and non-profit organisations in governance, policy and contractual matters. Prior to practicing law, John lived and worked in Southern Africa for five years where he was the founding National Program Director of the Public Policy Partnership in South Africa, a program that built and led a coalition of government, universities and local/international funding organisations to provide public policy training to South African students.



**The Learning Lab:** 'Identities and Social Justice' ([www.learninglab.ie](http://www.learninglab.ie)) is a collaborative public education project supported by FOMACS (Forum on Migration and Communications) and the British Council in association with the Instituto Cervantes. The Learning Lab opens a cross-sector learning environment for a focused discussion on the theme of identities aligned with the concept of social justice drawing on a series of projects in Australia, Canada, US and the UK.





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