

## **NEWS RELEASE**

### **30 January 2002**

#### **No More Dead Children**

The Children's Rights Alliance today called on the Government to establish an Office of Ombudsman for Children without further delay and to conduct an investigation into the circumstances surrounding the death this week of the 18-year-old Dublin girl in the care of the Northern Area Health Board.

"How many children must die before a strong, independent statutory body to promote and protect the rights of children is finally established?" asked Raymond Dooley, Chief Executive of the Children's Rights Alliance. "The tragic death of the Dublin girl represents the third death of a child who has come before Mr Justice Peter Kelly's court in less than two years. Yesterday, the High Court judge expressed fears for the life of another child whose case has come before him.

"With the Supreme Court decision last month to limit the capacity of the judiciary to order government officials to meet their obligations to children, it is particularly important that the Office of Ombudsman for Children be created without further delay. An independent Ombudsman would provide children and their parents or guardians a powerful ally to ensure that government agencies live up to their responsibilities to protect children, particularly those most at-risk.

Calls and promises to establish an Office of Ombudsman for Children date back to 1995. The Children's Rights Alliance, which has advocated since its inception for the creation of an Ombudsman for Children, welcomed the first governmental commitment in December 1996. In January 1998, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child urged Ireland to take action on this issue as part of its Concluding Observations on Ireland's performance in implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. In 1999, and again in November 2000 with the launch of the National Children's Strategy, the Government promised to create through legislation an independent Office of Ombudsman for Children. Provision to publish such legislation was made in the Legislation Programme for the Dail's Summer Session and again for the Autumn Session, but the legislation remains unpublished.

The Alliance also called today for an investigation to be undertaken into the circumstances leading up to the death of the 18-year-old Dublin girl. The child had been in the voluntary care of the Northern Area Health Board since 1997. According to a child psychiatrist who assessed her in 2000, the quality of the care she had received since 1997 was "disastrous". According to testimony given in court in April 2001, she had had 14 separate unsuitable placements over the previous 3 years, including many B&B accommodations, and had been exposed to high levels of risk on the streets.

Two years ago she went to the High Court to seek suitable care and accommodation for herself and her children. Today she is dead.

The Children's Rights Alliance is a coalition of sixty-eight non-governmental organisations concerned with meeting the needs and promoting the rights of children in Ireland. The Alliance seeks the full implementation in Ireland of the principles and provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.