

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

**Closing Remarks by Chairperson, Ms. Justice Mary Laffoy,
at the Fourth Meeting of the Citizens' Assembly
on the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution
The Grand Hotel, Malahide, Sunday 5 March, 2017**

Good afternoon everyone. I just want to say a few words before we wrap up what has been our longest weekend of deliberations.

I would like to thank all of the groups who attended today and presented to us. I think the members will agree that we have heard wide-ranging, diverse and often conflicting arguments on the issue. These arguments generated some interesting questions from the floor.

All of the groups presentations will be available to watch back online later today, as will all documentation from the weekend's proceedings.

I would also like to thank all of those groups that made submissions who we could not invite to present to us this weekend but whose papers I know have generated great interest and are all available to view on our website.

I express the same gratitude to the women whose stories we listened to yesterday afternoon. I commend their bravery about speaking about intensely private and personal details of their lives. The same applies to all individuals who shared their personal stories through the submissions process. All of these are available to be read on our website.

Next Weekend

We next meet on the weekend of the 22-23 April. That will be our final meeting to consider the Eighth Amendment and it will focus exclusively on ballot paper voting.

The weekend will take on a completely different structure to what we have been used to the past four meetings.

It is not intended that we will receive any further presentations or papers for that weekend.

I want to say something briefly about the structure and format for the final weekend.

In a few moments the citizens will do their final piece of work for the weekend.

The members will complete an anonymous feedback sheet, where they are being asked to make comments and preliminary suggestions on what types of issues they think should be voted upon or included on a ballot paper at our final weekend. Comments and suggestions can refer to legal avenues and/or particular aspects of the substantive issue.

This is not meant to record definitely the views of the citizens in any way, but rather to assist myself, the Secretariat and the Expert Advisory Group to plan the work program for the weekend of 22-23 April. The

Steering Group will also have an important role to play here over the next six weeks.

Broadly speaking I see the final weekend comprising a series of important steps; agreeing on the issues to be included in a ballot, agreeing on the precise wording of the ballot and finally voting. It is important to recall in this regard that the Assembly is an exercise in deliberative democracy and therefore the members must be able to take full ownership of the recommendations they are making.

Given the complexity of the topic, I anticipate that each one of these aspects will be challenging. We may need to consult further with relevant experts, and have them on hand at the weekend to assist with answering any queries arising from the citizens. What is clear is that we will require the full weekend to reach our conclusions.

The results of the vote will form the recommendations we will provide to the Houses of the Oireachtas.

I am confident we will meet our deadline of providing a report with our recommendations to the Houses of the Oireachtas by June

Schedule of Remaining Meetings

Finally, I would like to make an announcement about the timing of the meetings on the remaining topics. The decision has been made to remove the May date from our schedule and to include a new date in September. This is to allow us to complete our report on the Eight Amendment without impediment and to prepare comprehensively for our remaining important topics.

This means that we will be considering the challenges and opportunities of an ageing population at the June meeting. We will be opening the submissions process on this topic in the coming weeks.

Climate change will be considered at the July meeting and on the last weekend of September, we will consider fixed-term parliaments and the manner in which referenda are held.

Even with this re-scheduling we will still complete our work within one year from the date of our first meeting, as the Oireachtas resolution stipulates.

We now move into private session to allow the members to provide the feedback I spoke of earlier.

For now though I would like to thank all the members for their hard work and concentration this weekend. It has again been a difficult and emotional weekend but I am encouraged by the dedication and engagement each one of you show.

See you all again in April.

ENDS