



Press Release Monday 22nd April 2013

30 Years Since Norris Judgement: Huge Progress for Lesbian and Gay People

Today, 22nd April 2013, is the 30th anniversary of the Supreme Court Judgement in the Norris vs Ireland case, in which the Supreme Court rejected an appeal by now Senator David Norris in his case seeking to repeal the laws criminalising homosexuality.

“There has been an extraordinary transformation in the status of lesbian and gay people in the 30 years since the Norris case was dismissed by the Supreme Court: from criminalisation and almost complete marginalisation to a now just one step away from Constitutional equality” said GLEN Chair Kieran Rose.

In June 1993 criminal status was finally abolished by the Oireachtas – 20 years ago this year. Since then powerful equality legislation was introduced giving significant protection to lesbian and gay people and other groups vulnerable to discrimination. Ireland was one of the first countries in the world to introduce such comprehensive equality legislation which was adopted as a model for the European Union.

In June 2010 the Dáil unanimously passed a marriage-like Civil Partnership Act. The current Government, and the Minister for Justice and Equality in particular, has committed to introduce comprehensive parenting reforms for lesbian and gay families. There are strong moves towards civil marriage reflected in public opinion and the support of all almost all political parties.

“The historic vote at the Constitutional Convention a week ago strongly supporting access to civil marriage and constitutional protection for lesbian and gay couples and families demonstrates clearly how far Ireland has moved since the Norris case” continued Rose.

“Many people have contributed to this progress; Senator Norris and his allies in his Court cases; organisations who worked with GLEN to lobby for decriminalisation; successive Governments who have enacted progressive legislation towards full equality for lesbian and gay people; but most importantly, all the thousands of lesbian and gay people who came out in their everyday lives to their families, friends, work colleagues and in their communities. Collectively they have transformed the lives of lesbian and gay people in Ireland and made it possible to go to the next step to Constitutional equality” said Rose

“We salute the courage and tenacity of Senator Norris in taking the case. It proved to be a catalyst for much of the subsequent progress achieved in Ireland” concluded Rose.

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For further information:

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Editors Note:

Senator Norris had taken a case that his Constitutional right to privacy was undermined by the criminalisation of homosexuality in 1861 Offences Against the Person Act and the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act. His case had been turned down by the High Court and appealed to the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court issued its judgement on 22nd April 1983, refusing the appeal.

David Norris was represented in the case by Mary Robinson, BL, who later became the first female President of Ireland and UN Human Rights Commissioner.

Senator Norris then appealed to the European Court of Human Rights which ruled in his favour in 1988. It took a further 5 years of lobbying by Senator Norris and organisations including GLEN to have the laws repealed. In 1993 the Fianna Fáil/Labour coalition Government repealed the laws criminalising homosexuality and did so on the basis of an equal age of consent for both heterosexual and homosexual couples.

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