

# **Speech by the Taoiseach, Mr Bertie Ahern, T.D. on the occasion of the 30th Anniversary of the Law Reform Commission**

## **23 June 2005**

I am honoured to be in Farnleigh this evening to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the establishment of the Law Reform Commission.

Today marks an important milestone for the Law Reform Commission. Over its three-decade history, the Commission has made a valuable and significant contribution to updating the laws of the State. In fact, the establishment of the Commission in 1975, recognised the need for a co-ordinated approach to law reform. This meant standing back from particular sectoral interests and taking a broad view of the law in general. What was envisaged – and what has been achieved over that time – is an impartial agency, engaged in the task of law reform, with the flexibility to consult freely with outside experts from legal and other disciplines.

The scope of law reform given to the Law Reform Commission is a very broad one. The Commission has a mandate to keep the law under review and to make recommendations for its reform – not just for updating the law or amending existing laws but also for the codification and consolidation of the law.

As we are all aware, the reform of the law is not an end in itself, or indeed a purely academic exercise. Law affects people in their most important relationships and in their everyday lives. Law must adapt to the changing needs of society. And this is where the role of the Law Reform Commission is of real importance.

The Commission's work in addressing the most critical areas of law reform can readily be seen in the scope of its recent work – through its Consultation Papers and Reports. Recent Consultation Papers, for instance, have dealt with the law as it affects the elderly and vulnerable adults generally – a topic, which is very relevant to many of our current concerns.

Furthermore, we are all conscious of the changing nature of our modern society. In this regard, the Commission has published a Consultation Paper on cohabitees and is working towards a Report in this area. I look forward to the publication of the Commission's Report.

Another area of the law, which affects practically every family and individual in our community, is what is broadly referred to as land law and conveyancing. This comes into play every time a home is bought or property changes hands. Our land law is rooted in the pre-1922 period, with many statutes and rules stretching back over the centuries to

feudal times. Modernisation, simplification and reform are clearly long overdue and the Law Reform Commission is now engaged in this major project. I know that the task is almost complete and a crucial Report will be published in mid July. And, as has been the case with all recent Law Reform Commission Reports, this Report will have a draft Bill attached, thus greatly facilitating the Government's work of reform.

Coupled with the land law project, the Commission is also engaged in an e-conveyancing project. Many of us will have experienced the delays and difficulties, which can occur, for instance, in the technicalities of buying a home. In simple terms, e-conveyancing will bring this process into the 21st century. As you know, the Government is committed to driving forward the e-Government agenda and I see the move towards e-conveyancing as a vital part of this process.

As you will be aware, the Law Reform Commission's present programme of law reform is timed to be completed in 2007 and the Commission will shortly begin to plan for its future programme. In this context, there will be wide consultation with interested bodies, with the Government, with the legal profession – in fact with anyone who has a contribution to make.

When the Commission's current programme of law reform was being formulated, I referred the proposed programme to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice, Equality, Defence and Women's Rights for their views. In this way, we involved the legislature as well as the Government in planning the law reform process.

In recent years, the Law Reform Commission has been working more closely with Government Departments – particularly with the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. I know that this closer relationship is working very well and is welcomed by the Departments concerned.

Most importantly, as we reflect today on the 30 year history of the Law Reform Commission, we have an opportunity to pay tribute to the many individuals and groups who have ensured the continued success of the Commission. Primarily, of course, has been the leadership provided by successive Presidents and Commissioners.

Throughout its history, too, the Commission has had an excellent relationship with the successive Attorneys General and with the Government as a whole. The Commission has also been assisted by the many members of the legal profession and other disciplines who have willingly given of their time in providing additional advice and expertise. This has been critical to your work.

Tribute must also be paid to the teams of researchers who work with the Commission in the preparation of all its Consultation Papers and Reports. You represent an invaluable backbone to this process.

And finally, a debt of gratitude is also owed to the many people who, over the years, have made submissions to the Commission in response to the Consultation Papers published.

This interaction between the Commission and the general community is of enormous value and is very important in driving forward your ongoing work.

I have little doubt, that given the volume and breadth of work undertaken by the Law Reform Commission over the past three decades, the next

30 years will be as productive in driving law reform in this country.

I congratulate you on reaching this important milestone and I wish you every enjoyment of this evening's celebrations.

Thank you.

**ENDS**