

2nd March 2023

Attn: Mr Simon Coveney T.D.
Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2,
D02 TD30.

Re: Religious Discrimination in Military Chaplaincy

Dear Mr Coveney,

I refer to Adjudication Reference ADJ-00031432 from the Workplace Relations Commission, which has decided that you unlawfully discriminated against me because I am an atheist, contrary to the Employment Equality Acts 1998-2021.

I have attached for your convenience the letter that you wrote to the Most Reverend Bishop Tom Deenihan on 6th November 2020, appointing a Roman Catholic priest to a publicly-funded position without advertisement or tender. This was less than a month after His Excellency had written to you seeking this appointment. In contrast, while I had written to you during the same month expressing an interest in the same role, I received only a one line acknowledgement from your secretary. Given that this behaviour on your part has been found to represent unlawful religious discrimination against me, perhaps you might now do me the small courtesy of providing a personal reply?

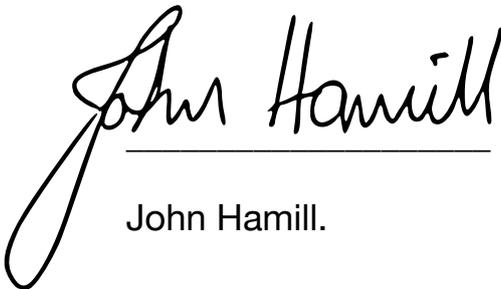
I grew up as part of a Roman Catholic household in West Belfast during the 1970s and 1980s. Throughout this period, I knew what it was to experience military services that discriminated against minorities because of their beliefs about religion. By the time I moved to Dublin, the Ulster Defence Regiment had been disbanded. At that time, I would have been astonished if anyone had suggested to me that as an atheist, I would become the victim of sectarian discrimination with respect to the Irish Defence Forces. Given that you were personally responsible for this unlawful discrimination against

me (in this case because I am now part of a different minority) I would be grateful if you could answer directly the following questions for me:

1. Will you offer a public apology to all members of the Irish Defence Forces for the religious discrimination within their Support Services that you were personally responsible for? Will you offer a particular apology to the atheist and minority faith members of our Defence Forces who have been directly harmed by your unlawful behaviour?
2. Will you ensure that cabinet begins the process of changing the Defence Forces Regulations so that in future, military chaplaincy roles are awarded to the best candidate for the job and not merely the candidate preferred by a given bishop? Will you seek to ensure that no more atheist and minority faith citizens of Ireland are again the victims of such unlawful religious discrimination in the appointment of State-funded positions?

Even though I am only a mere citizen of this country and not a Roman Catholic bishop, I hope that you will be able to reply to this letter anyway.

Yours Sincerely,



John Hamill.



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The Most Reverend Tom Deenihan
Bishop of Meath
Dublin Road
Mullingar
N91 DW32

6 November, 2020.

Your Excellency,

Thank you for your letter of the 8th October, 2020 nominating Father Michael Hinds as Chaplain to the Defence Forces.

I am most pleased to accept your nomination in this regard, and Father Hinds' appointment will be effective from the 8th November, 2020, subject to the normal security and medical clearance requirements.

I should like to take this opportunity to wish Father Hinds every success in his new position.

Yours most sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Simon Coveney', written over a horizontal line.

Simon Coveney, T.D.,
Minister for Defence and
Minister for Foreign Affairs