

Call to assist Irish prisoners abroad

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THE BISHOP of Derry and chairman of the Bishops' Council for Emigrants, Séamus Hegarty, has urged the Government to honour a commitment to assist Irish prisoners abroad.

In a St Patrick's Day message, he said the Government-sponsored Report on Irish Prisoners Abroad - published last August - presented "a disturbing snapshot of the conditions, problems and issues faced by prisoners and their families". He said that the Government should implement the report's recommendations in full and "do all it can to alleviate the anxiety and hardship experienced by this most vulnerable group of emigrants".

The Government was "critical in the development of policy and the provision of financial resources to those who provide outreach to our vulnerable migrants".

"There is a growing awareness of the implications of migration both for the migrant, and for sending and receiving societies," he added.

At the time of the report's publication, Minister for Foreign Affairs Dermot Ahern said that he was "sympathetic" to the idea of a hardship fund for Irish prisoners abroad.

In his address, Dr Hegarty also urged people to "be fully at home in our own faith tradition".

"Faith and religious belief have too conveniently been ushered into the realm of the personal and private domains," he said, adding that St Patrick came to Ireland with "openness to our traditions" and people needed to take him as a model, while being "able to dialogue confidently with those of other faith traditions".

As Ireland evolved into a "new phase of growth and development, we are more than ever called to identify our values and our traditions of belief that are foundational to human dignity and to a civilised, caring society," he added.

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