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KRW Law Statement on Today's Review of the Court Challenge to Irish Language Signage in Central Station

We welcome the Court's recognition today of our client, Conradh na Gaeilge's, legitimate interest in this case and the direction from the Court that we are to be provided with all relevant Court documentation. This acknowledgment marks an important step in affirming their standing and the significance of their intervention in these matters.

The case challenges the decision by the infrastructure Minister Liz Kimmins to approve a £150,000 scheme for dual-language Irish and English signage at the newly opened Grand Central Station in Belfast.

Conradh na Gaeilge has sought permission to intervene in the proceedings, asserting that the inclusion of Irish language signage is consistent with the powers of the Minister, international best practice and the Executive's commitments made under the Good Friday Agreement.

Speaking today after the challenge was reviewed by the Court, solicitor Niall Murphy of KRW Law said:

"Our application to intervene in this case on behalf of Conradh na Gaeilge, was to support the decision to erect dual-language signage in Grand Central Station, and to assist the court's comprehension of what we consider to be a positive duty on the Department under various international treaties.

The decision sits well within the letter and spirit of the Good Friday Agreement, calling for "resolute action to promote the language" and to "facilitate and encourage the use of Irish in speech and writing in public life".

We welcome the decision by the Court to seek the informed opinion of the Irish Language Commissioner, which in time, will likely make this application redundant."

President of Conradh na Gaeilge, Ciarán Mac Giolla Bhéin, commented outside the High Court today:

"Conradh na Gaeilge welcomes the court's direction today to grant us access to the papers involved in the case, prior to our intervention being heard. More importantly, we believe Justice McAlinden's proposal to seek the input and expertise of the newly appointed Irish Language Commissioner to be sensible and prudent. We would anticipate that the Irish Language Commissioner, who under the legislation will develop 'best practice standards', will come to the conclusion that dual-language signage in shared spaces is a best practice model enjoyed and enshrined in other countries with similar circumstances, ultimately supporting the Minister's original position."

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Conradh na Gaeilge believes the Minister was well within her remit to take this decision to erect dual-language signage in Grand Central Station in line with her Department's duties regarding the promotion of Irish. The decision sits well within the letter and spirit of the Good Friday Agreement, calling for "resolute action to promote the language" and to "facilitate and encourage the use of Irish in speech and writing in public life". The Minister's decision was also supported by a motion passed by Belfast City Council, and formal advice given by Foras na Gaeilge, the cross-border agency tasked with providing statutory guidance to government on the promotion of Irish.

We consider dual-language signage, where English and Irish are placed side by side equally, to be a very physical manifestation of equality. There is nothing controversial about equality. International best practice and expertise tells us that promoting Irish alongside English on public signage leads to increased normalisation of the language, and in turn, increased tolerance and mutual respect."

[ENDS]