

**Question on Notice
No. 37
Asked on 12 February 2014**

MRS CUNNINGHAM asked the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services (MR DEMPSEY)—

QUESTION:

With reference to groups of men wearing knives as part of their 'religious dress' and as these are potentially lethal weapons and cause people significant concern—

Will the Minister consider changes to the Act, where such adornments must be incapable of causing harm (for example, a safe replica)?

ANSWER:

Legislation in relation to section 51 of the *Weapons Act 1990* (the Weapons Act) was amended in 2011 to provide a reasonable excuse for members of religious groups to carry what could be described as a weapon (knife) for 'genuine religious purposes'. The example given in the Weapons Act at section 51(4) is that a member of the Sikh community could be allowed to carry a kirpan as one of the five tenets of their religion.

A kirpan is only worn by baptised members of the Sikh community. The kirpan is a symbolic sword that is not of a significant size and not sharpened. The kirpan is kept in a sheath and is not normally on display.

Preparation for Baptism within the Sikh religion involves an extensive process which deals with the responsibility of not only wearing the five articles of faith, but also the responsibility attached to the carriage of items, particularly the kirpan.

Incidents of baptised members of the Sikh community using their kirpan are rare and I am unaware of any incidents of a kirpan being used inappropriately.

There currently are no plans to amend this provision of the Weapons Act.