

Human Rights Consortium Scotland

Introduction

The Human Rights Consortium Scotland (HRCS) is pleased to have the opportunity to make a statement to you today as part of the UN's Universal Periodic review of UK compliance with its international human rights obligations. We would draw your attention to the submission we made on 21st November 2011 'Universal Periodic Review of UK: A civil society perspective from Scotland on human rights promotion, delivery and compliance'. In that submission we proposed specific questions and provided background information.

The (HRCS) was set up in January 2010 and is a network of 37 civil society organisations working to increase awareness of human rights and to build capacity on delivering human rights principles and standards so that people's daily lives are improved. Members cover issues such as poverty, discrimination, combating violence and members work with specific as well as specific groups of people such as children, women and national minorities.

General Problems

The HRCS seeks an informed human rights culture in Scotland. Too often people understand human rights in Egypt and Syria but are unaware of how human rights law can positively impact on their daily lives. The HRCS is concerned that human rights are still regarded by the general public as belonging to a few rather than to us all, equally.

The HRCS is concerned about a number of service cuts and policy changes that negatively impact on the lives of the most vulnerable. For example the Government claims that the current welfare reform will 'protect the most vulnerable in our society'¹

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but our member The Glasgow Disability Alliance has detailed information of the negative impact of the 'reforms' and you will hear specific details from another member today, Inclusion Scotland. The HRCS is also concerned that when laws are passed there is little detailed consideration of the human rights implications and we are disappointed that our calls for the establishment of a Human Rights Committee at the Scottish Parliament was not supported by any political party with elected MSPs (Members of the Scottish Parliament). Were such a Committee to exist, its focus on human rights may encourage more informed views e.g. about reforming the law on the physical punishment of children in Scotland.

Paris Principles and NHRIs

The HRCS understands its duties given the Paris Principles. We do and will continue to work in partnership with the Scottish Government and we were pleased that the Human Rights Policy Manager at the Scottish Government spoke at our last meeting.

The HRCS was pleased that the SHRC was set up in 2008 and looks forward to the publication of its 'Action Plan in Human Rights' later in 2012.

The EHRC is charged with equality as well as human rights duties and we encourage it to ensure that human rights initiatives that apply to England should be equally extended to Scotland e.g. adaptation of its existing teaching resource on human rights to fit with the Scottish curriculum.

Questions for the UK

The HRCS is focusing on process issues.

1. What leadership has the Scottish Government taken to ensure the Human Rights Act reaches its full potential?
2. What steps has the Scottish Government taken to ensure that public bodies promote human rights as well as do the minimum necessary to comply with the legislation?
3. How has the Scottish Government promoted human rights to the general public (and addressed misunderstandings)?

4. How has the Scottish Government ensured human rights promotion and compliance within those bodies which it funds e.g through the regulator Audit Scotland of the 32 local authorities, 14 geographical health boards and 8 'Special Health Boards'? We know this is possible as one of the Special Boards, the State Hospital Board Carstairs, has implemented a human rights action plan.
5. Will the Scottish Government issue guidance on the status of UN Treaties in Scotland, given the Scotland Act 1998?
6. What specific steps have already been taken to give effect to the UPR recommendation from Egypt on socio economic duties? Also, to give effect to the UN's 'Business and Human Rights' Agenda in respect of companies that employ people to work in Scotland?

Conclusion

We welcome the UPR process as:

- An important opportunity to shine a torch on Scotland's promotion of and compliance with, international, ratified human rights Treaties.
- We have high hopes that your deliberations will make a difference to how laws are made and their implementation evaluated; how services are delivered in Scotland, how decisions are made on funding and priorities and reinforce the duty that our 10,000 public authorities should take progressive steps to realise human rights.
- We look to the UN to make recommendations that help our work and the daily lives of the people we work with
- We believe specific recommendations from the UN about how human rights can be mainstreamed in our everyday lives would be most beneficial – if we cannot get human rights to inform State work on care of the elderly then human rights will not influence State decisions e.g about gypsy traveller sites.

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