

05/06/2009

PRESS RELEASE

Call for Government to sign up to Disability Convention in full

In a joint statement released today both the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) and the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) welcome the announcement by the UK Government that it will ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on 8 June 2009.

Chief Commissioner of the Equality Commission for ECNI, Bob Collins said:

“As the first human rights convention of the 21st Century this historic international treaty will affirm the human rights of disabled people and potentially allow for the greater protection of these rights. We look forward to the development of an effective national plan of action with activities, projects and clear timelines. There must now be real implementation on the ground to ensure significant, positive, differences to the lives of people with disabilities.”

Both Commissions, however believe that government should fully ratify all of the provisions in the Convention.

NIHRC Chief Commissioner Monica McWilliams commented:

“Whilst the Human Rights Commission is pleased that government will shortly ratify this Convention, we are concerned at the range and breadth of the reservations the government intends to introduce. Such reservations have a significant potential to undermine the ability of the Convention to bring about the exciting changes it heralds in how disabled people are treated in our society. The Commission can see no reason for

the UK to do less than other states to protect the rights of disabled people and we therefore urge the government to sign up to the Convention in full.”

The Commissions have been jointly designated as the independent monitoring mechanism of the Convention in Northern Ireland. In looking forward to this new role both Commissions are keen to have the support of Government to promote, protect and monitor the implementation of the Convention locally.

They will also be working with the Equality and Human Rights Commission and the Scottish Human Rights Commission who have been similarly designated in Great Britain.

The four Commissions, along with the UK Disabled Peoples Council, Disability Awareness in Action and Scope, are sponsoring a Parliamentary Seminar to mark the ratification of the Convention at Westminster on Monday June 8.

Ends

Notes to editors

1. Two major limitations exist to the Government’s commitment to full implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. These are the question of proposed reservations and interpretative declaration and the resourcing of the Article 33 National Implementation and Monitoring Mechanisms.

2. The Explanatory Memorandum laid out by Government sets out four areas of the Convention where the UK intends to reserve its position, that is, not to fully sign up to observing the Convention rights. These areas are:

- Education
- Immigration
- Employment in the armed forces, and
- Review of benefit appointees

3. Both the ECNI and NIHRC have taken issue with three of these four areas, the exception being the review of benefit appointees. The detail of the NIHRC's concerns is set out in its written evidence to the Joint Committee on Human Rights which is available to download [here](#)