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PRESS RELEASE

Call for fresh impetus on delivering disability rights

The four human rights and equality commissions of the UK will today collectively call for a fresh impetus to ensuring disabled people are able to participate fully and equally in society. The call comes at a Parliamentary Seminar to mark the ratification by the UK of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities.

The Convention is the first human rights treaty of the 21st century. It represents a major step in helping to ensure that the rights of disabled people are protected.

Many of the rights in the Convention covering health, education, housing and participation are still not fully protected in UK law. Evidence gathered by the EHRC shows that many disabled people continue to experience restricted opportunities:

- People with learning disabilities face serious barriers to accessing healthcare, in some cases resulting in deaths which could have been avoided
- Many disabled people are subjected to violence and hostility on a daily basis which prevent them from actively participating in society
- More than one third of disabled adults of working age live in poverty, with over half not in paid employment
- At age 16 disabled people are twice as likely not to be in any form of employment, education or training. Disabled people aged 16-24 are also twice as likely as their peers to have no formal qualifications.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), the Scottish Human Rights Commission (SHRC), the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) and the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) have been designated under the Convention as the component parts of the UK's 'independent mechanism' and are

tasked with promoting and monitoring the UK and devolved government's implementation of the convention .

Speaking ahead of the Seminar EHRC Commissioner Baroness Jane Campbell said:

"Ratification of the disability Convention is an important and historic milestone, but we cannot allow the Convention to now sit on a shelf gathering dust. The Convention will only have meaning to disabled people in what Eleanor Roosevelt famously referred to as *'those small places, close to home'* .

"That is why we want to see the Convention guiding future legislative and policy development in all the UK jurisdictions, and we want to see the withdrawal of the reservations that the UK has declared on ratification."

Her words were supported by the Chief Commissioner for the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, Bob Collins. He said: "We look forward to the development of an effective UK-wide plan of actions with clear timelines. There must now be real implementation on the ground to ensure significant, positive, difference to the lives of people with disabilities."

NIHRC Chief Commissioner Monica McWilliams commented:

"The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission urges government to sign up to the Convention in full as we can see no reason for the UK to do less than other countries to protect the rights of disabled people."

Professor Alan Miller, Chair of the Scottish Human Rights Commission added:

"This Convention makes absolutely clear that persons with disabilities are holders of rights and not recipients of welfare. Implementing this Convention will require that the UK, and the Scottish Government, broaden their actions on disability from a narrow focus on discrimination and equality to a holistic action plan to fulfil all human rights of persons with disabilities. This must be done with their active participation."

The seminar will be hosted by Andrew Dismore MP, Chair of the Joint Committee on Human Rights. Speakers include Jonathan Shaw MP - Minister for Disabled People, Mark Harper MP - Shadow Minister for Disabled People, John Barrett MP - Liberal

Democrat Disability Spokesperson and Lord Hannay of Chiswick - Chair, United Nations Association of the UK.

ENDS

Notes to Editors:

- The Parliamentary Seminar to mark the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities will take place on Monday 8th June in the WilsonRoom, Portcullis House, Westminster from 17:30 - 18:45.
- The Seminar is sponsored by the Equality and Human Rights Commission with the Scottish Human Rights Commission, the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, the UK Disabled Peoples Council, Disability Awareness in Action and Scope.
- The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) is the first human rights treaty of the 21st Century. It will be ratified by the UK on Monday 8th June 2009, but subject to four reservations that limit its application in the UK. The last UN human rights treaty to be ratified by the UK Government was the Children's Convention in 1992.
- The Convention requires Government to designate one or more 'independent mechanisms' to promote, protect and monitor implementation of the Convention. In the UK, the Equality and Human Rights Commission, Scottish Human Rights Commission, Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission and Equality Commission for Northern Ireland will share this role.