

**27/03/2009**

## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **Ratification of UN Convention is Essential for Rights of Disabled People**

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland has welcomed the imminent ratification by the United Kingdom Government of the U N Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

Bob Collins, Chief Commissioner of the Equality Commission, said that the Commission considered the Convention to be an important development, helping to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal participation in all aspects of our society by disabled people.

“The Equality Commission looks forward to the development of an effective national plan of actions, with activities, programmes, projects and clear time lines, he said.

“Particularly welcome is the proposal by the Government to sign an optional protocol enabling individuals to bring complaints directly to the U N Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, provided all available domestic remedies have been exhausted. We also strongly support the involvement of disabled persons’ organisations in all aspects of the implementation of the Convention. The ratification of the Convention must lead to real implementation on the ground, and make a significant difference in the lives of persons with disabilities.”

Though the Government intends to ratify the Convention, this will be accompanied by an interpretative declaration and a reservation on the issue of education for disabled children and by three other reservations - on Departmental appointees, on liberty of movement and nationality, and on the exemption from the Disability Discrimination Act

of the armed forces. “The Commission considers most of these to be unnecessary and potentially counterproductive.” Bob Collins said. “Practical issues, whether they concern the provision of an inclusive education system, the operation of fair and effective immigration procedures or the operational ability of the armed forces, can all be addressed adequately under the terms of the existing legislation. These reservations send a signal which is directly counter to the positive commitments in the UN Convention – for example, the commitment to strive progressively to ensure an inclusive education system.”

“The Equality Commission believes that all the provisions of the Convention should be fully realised in order to remove all barriers to inclusion and participation faced by disabled people.” Mr. Collins said.

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland has, at the request of the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister, agreed to undertake, along with the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, the role of an ‘independent mechanism’ for promoting, protecting and monitoring the Convention within Northern Ireland.