



01/12/2010

PRESS RELEASE

Conference to Discuss Rights of People with Disabilities



People with disabilities will have a chance to have their say on what the priorities for change should be in Northern Ireland at a unique conference on Wednesday December 1, 2010.

The platform event in Templepatrick, Co Antrim will discuss the rights of people with disabilities and the steps government should take to fully implement the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities here. The Convention requires the Government to promote, protect and ensure the human rights of disabled people by removing the barriers they face and covers areas such as health, employment, education, access to justice and independent living.

Organised by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, the event will provide a real opportunity for engagement between policy makers, government representatives, people with disabilities and organisations involved in disability issues.

Monica McWilliams, Chief Commissioner of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission said, "The United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities is the first international human rights treaty of the 21st Century. It requires the government to take specific actions to protect and promote the human rights of disabled people. The Commission along with the Equality Commission has been tasked with monitoring how government fulfils its new duties. We will report our findings to the United Nations to ensure that these rights are adequately protected in Northern Ireland."

Bob Collins, Chief Commissioner of the Equality Commission NI said, "The Commission receives more complaints about disability issues than anything else, and represented

31% of all calls to our enquiry line last year. This conference will identify key issues and gaps in current provision for disabled people and focus on those areas where many disabled people continue to experience restricted opportunities. We want to make this conference a real opportunity for disabled people to air their views, to raise awareness of the UN Convention and to champion the mainstreaming of disability rights in Northern Ireland.

"We want to hear from people with disabilities about what is important to them and this conference will be one of a number of engagement initiatives."

The two Commissions will jointly monitor the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities by the Northern Ireland Government and will share their work at the conference. This will include an analysis of the legislative and policy gaps here and invite views on which areas should be prioritised for change.

The conference will feature a range of speakers including a representative of OFMdFM; Professor Rachel Murray from Bristol University and a number of individuals who will share their personal experiences on the issue of disability alongside a series of workshops to capture the views of attendees. Following the conference, a dedicated Facebook page will be launched to continue the debate.

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission are jointly designated with a role to promote, protect and monitor the implementation of the Convention by the Northern Ireland Government. They will be publishing a report in early 2012 which will analyse and assess how the local administration has fulfilled its obligations. This report, along with others from Scotland, England and Wales, will also contribute to a UK-wide report on the United Kingdom's overall implementation of the Convention.

Those who have suggestions on priorities for change can also submit them by email crpdenquiries@equalityni.org or by telephoning on 028 90500645.

Note to editors:

1. Almost two out of every five households in Northern Ireland include at least one person with a limiting disability. More than one-fifth (21%) of adults in Northern Ireland have at least one disability.
2. The UK ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) on Monday 8 June 2009.

3. The core of the UNCRPD focuses on ensuring disabled people are empowered to make their own decisions, are free to enjoy all fundamental freedoms and human rights, and can participate actively in society.
4. Monitoring roles have been assigned to the GB 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). Collectively, these bodies represent the UK's "independent mechanism" and are tasked with promoting, protecting and monitoring the implementation of the Convention by the UK and devolved governments.
5. The UNCRPD sets out the obligations on State Parties to promote, protect and ensure the rights of persons with disabilities are protected. The Convention has modified, transformed and added to traditional human rights concepts (describing new rights including a number of collective or social group rights such as awareness raising, social protection and poverty reduction, international cooperation and extensive exposition of rights to leisure, tourism and recreation).
6. The monitoring bodies will play a key role in ensuring that domestic policy adjusts to the values of the Convention and brings about local solutions acceptable to the universal norms of the Convention.
7. A key principle of the Convention relates to the involvement and active participation of civil society, in particular persons with disabilities and their representative organisations in the monitoring process.