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## PRESS RELEASE

### Concern issued for disability rights protections

As we mark the International Day of Disabled Persons (3rd December 2017) the Human Rights Commission and Equality Commission have warned the UK Government that the introduction of welfare reform has imposed real hardship on many disabled people across Northern Ireland. Their joint view is that further mitigation measures are required to prevent the roll out of social security reforms from causing further harm to people with disabilities in Northern Ireland.

This comes after a United Nations Committee reported earlier this year that disabled people had been disproportionately affected by the welfare reforms and the impact of the reforms amounted to 'grave or systematic violations of [their] rights'.

Chief Commissioner of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, Les Allamby stated:

"We are concerned that social security reforms are adversely contributing to high levels of poverty amongst persons with disabilities and their families. As levels of poverty are projected to increase, in particular through the introduction of universal credit and the sanctions regime, we are calling on the Government to do more to protect this vulnerable group in uncertain times. Together both organisations have raised these concerns with the Minister of State for Disabled People, Health and Work in the UK Government. This is not just a wish list for the Government we are asking it to fulfil its obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability."

The Commissions have highlighted the need for Government to take account of the real world impact of reforms on persons with disabilities, including the impact on their ability to afford groceries, heat their homes and to participate in society.

Dr Michael Wardlow, Chief Commissioner of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, added: "It's more than disappointing to be re-stating our call for Government action on the many inequalities confronting disabled people in Northern Ireland.

"The process of reassessing people receiving Disability Living Allowance (DLA) was commenced here in June 2017. It is reported that 36% of claimants here have been disallowed, a higher rate of disallowance than that in Great Britain, where it is 27%. In

Northern Ireland arrangements had been made by the Executive to mitigate the financial impact on anyone who, following assessment, had lost out as a result of the transfer from Disability Living Allowance to Personal Independence Payment. Mitigation measures apply to each individual for just one year from the date of their assessment. The UNCRPD Committee has stated that there should be an extension of the mitigating measures. We have called on Government before, and now call on it again, to publish full details of how it intends to mitigate the impacts affecting disabled people here after the current programme of support packages lapses.”

## **Notes to editors**

1. 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. [Watch a short video of this joint work.](#)
2. In August 2017, Theresa Degener the Chair of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities warned that reforms to social security provision in the UK had resulted in a 'human catastrophe'. This followed a critical report by the UN Committee to the UK Government in August 2017 when the Committee examined the government's progress in fulfilling its commitments to the Convention. The Concluding Observations of the UN Committee are available [here](#).
3. Following on from the recommendations in the Committees report the Human Rights Commission and the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland have advised the UK Government of its International Human Rights obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. They have issued a list of recommendations below.

## **Article 19 – Living independently and being included in the community**

- Adopt a rights based approach to implementing the recommendations on living independently and being included in the community. This includes ensuring that measures are affordable, accessible and sufficiently funded/resourced.

## **Article 27 – Work and employment**

- Persons with disabilities should enjoy accessible opportunities in terms of work and employment. This includes making reasonable adjustments for persons with disabilities.
- Those carrying out employment assessments are qualified in line with the human rights model of disability, and take into consideration work related as well as other personal circumstances.

## **Article 28 – Adequate standard of living and social protection**

- Ensure that there are effective protections for persons with disabilities regarding social security reforms. Such reforms should be rights-based, uphold the human rights model of disability and not disproportionately and/or adversely affect the rights of persons with disabilities.

4. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities requires the UK Government to promote, protect and ensure the rights of disabled people. Areas covered by the convention include: health, education, employment, access to justice, personal security, independent living and access to information.

5. The annual observance of the International Day of Disabled Persons was proclaimed in 1992, by the United Nations General Assembly resolution 47/3. This year's theme is Transformation towards sustainable and resilient society for all. The observance of the Day aims to promote an understanding of disability issues and mobilize support for the dignity, rights and well-being of persons with disabilities. It also seeks to increase awareness of gains to be derived from the integration of persons with disabilities in every aspect of political, social, economic and cultural life. Further information is available on the [United Nations website](#)