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PRESS RELEASE

United Nations has questions to ask UK Government on equality issues affecting women in Northern Ireland

Concern that Brexit could diminish protection under the law for women in Northern Ireland is one of the key issues the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland is putting to the United Nations Committee on the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

Roisin Mallon, Senior Policy Officer with the Commission, will be raising this issue in Geneva at a meeting of the CEDAW Committee on Monday. She will be asking the UN to question the UK Government about the steps it is taking to address a range of priority equality issues affecting women in Northern Ireland.

“Government must ensure that following the EU exit from the European Union there is no regression from equality rights and protections, including those for women. There must be effective engagement with women during the Brexit process,” said Roisin Mallon.

“There should also be firm proposals to mitigate the potential impact of the loss of EU funding aimed at promoting women’s equality, as well as the impact on the voluntary and community sector more generally.”

Currently women in Northern Ireland have significantly less protection under the law than women in Great Britain. The Commission is also calling for the strengthening of gender equality law to address these significant gaps, including on gender pay reporting. There is also a need for a revised gender equality strategy for Northern Ireland.

Other issues raised will include the need to ensure women’s economic independence by providing affordable and accessible childcare, as well as to encourage more women to participate in public and political life and in peacebuilding in Northern Ireland. The Commission is also calling for the removal of barriers to health care services for women and believes that Government should undertake a full public consultation on abortion law.

“Issues relating to gender equality, including sexual harassment, equal pay, gender stereotyping and violence against women, are frequently highlighted in the media, both in Northern Ireland and across the UK. It is clear that these are relevant and important issues to society today, and that further action is needed to address them. Year after year, complaints of sexual discrimination are still reported to our advice

team. It is also clear that equality between men and women is still some way off,” concluded Roisin Mallon.

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