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PRESS RELEASE

Equality Commission briefs UN Committee on NI gender discrimination issues

Today in Geneva, the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland is urging members of a United Nations Committee to hold the UK Government to account for its lack of progress in protecting and extending equality for women in Northern Ireland.

Roisin Mallon, Senior Policy Officer at the Commission, is briefing members of the UN Committee responsible for the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The Committee will shortly be holding a formal examination of how the United Kingdom is meeting its responsibilities under the Convention. The Commission has already furnished it with a report spelling out shortfalls in the Government's record and the actions needed to address these.

"We have been talking to women across Northern Ireland over the past year," Roisin Mallon said. "We have been listening to their views on issues which affect their lives most directly, and on which they want urgent action taken. A number of issues of concern have come through strongly and we are stressing them in our submission to the Committee," she said.

These include:

- The lower level of legal protection against sex discrimination for women in Northern Ireland, compared with elsewhere in the United Kingdom. These significant gaps and weaknesses in our gender equality laws need to be urgently addressed.
- The potential negative impact on women's equality following Brexit. There must be commitments to no regression in women's equality rights, to keep pace with any future enhancement of those rights and to mitigate the impact of any loss of EU funding.
- The under-representation of women in political life - at Westminster, the Assembly and local government - as well as in public life and economic decision-making roles generally. We need effective targeted action plans to deal with this.
- Major inequalities experienced by women in the workplace. Sex discrimination and harassment and unfair treatment of pregnant workers and mothers persists. Gender pay gap legislation has still not been implemented and there is still a lack of affordable childcare in Northern Ireland.

- Issues within education, where Government must take action to tackle gender stereotypes, address the under-representation of girls in STEM subjects and prevent gender based bullying.

“These are just some of the urgent issues which women from all sectors of life and all regions in Northern Ireland have been telling us about over the past year,” Roisin Mallon said. “I will be pressing the members of the UN Committee to put searching questions to the UK Government about how it intends to tackle them. The UN Committee’s role is to hold Governments to account for the commitments they have made under the Convention. We believe that urgent action is needed on all of the issues we will be raising in Geneva.”

- [Read the Commission’s CEDAW Shadow Report](#) (*pdf, Jan 2019*)
- Further information: www.equalityni.org/CEDAW