

# TREATY BODY MONITOR

International Service for Human Rights



Human Rights Monitor Series

## COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS 42<sup>ND</sup> SESSION UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND, 4 - 5<sup>TH</sup> REPORT 12 – 13 MAY 2009

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### Key facts<sup>1</sup>

Ratification	Reservations	Party to Optional Protocol <sup>2</sup>	Other core treaties ratified	Date of previous report/examination, and submission of present report
1976	Articles 6 and 7(a)(i), Article 8(b)(i) Article 10(i), Article 13(a)(ii) and Article 14.	No	ICCPR, CAT, CERD, CRC, CEDAW, CRPD	May 2002, 7 August 2007

<sup>1</sup> The information in this table is sourced from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), and is available at [www.ohchr.org/EN/Countries/Pages/HumanRightsintheWorld.aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Countries/Pages/HumanRightsintheWorld.aspx).

<sup>2</sup> Article 1 of the Optional Protocol provides that 'a State Party to the Covenant that becomes a Party to the present Protocol recognizes the competence of the Committee to receive and consider communications as provided for by the provisions of the present Protocol.'

## Opening remarks by the delegation

The delegation of the United Kingdom led by Dr Vijay Rangarajan, Constitution Director in the United Kingdom Ministry of Justice, comprised of 23 representatives from the Ministry of Justice, the Foreign & Commonwealth Office, the Home Office, the Welsh and Scottish Government, the Department of Health, the Department for Work & Pensions, the Department for Business, Enterprise & Regulatory Reform, the Department for Communities & Local Government, the Department for Children, Schools & Families, the Department for Innovation, Universities and skills and the Government Equalities Office. Northern Ireland was not represented at the session, an issue raised by the Committee.

Dr Vijay's comprehensive 30-minute opening statement started off by welcoming the opportunity to discuss the UK's fulfilment of its obligations under the Covenant and the Government's achievements and ambitions. The UK expressed appreciation at receiving a list of issues from the Committee raised after the submission of the State report to the Committee, and a written set of replies was forwarded on 17 February 2009. Dr. Vijay then elaborated on recent developments in the UK, for instance the establishment of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, which came into operation in October 2007, and the Scottish Human rights Commission, which works with the Northern Ireland Commission on Human Rights to ensure that UK citizens enjoy a full complement of national human rights institutions for their various jurisdictions. This is in accordance with the Concluding recommendations made in 2007. He then briefly touched upon developments made in the areas of health, education, employment and child wellbeing. Education standards have risen at all levels and across all major ethnic groups since the last UK report. There is a renewed focus on Gypsy, Roma and traveller children and poor children with special educational needs. The new National Health Service Constitution brings together the principles, values, rights and duties that underpin the NHS and ensures that all the relevant needs of patients, the public and staff are met. In closing, the head of the delegation informed the Committee of the recent launch into a public consultation on a UK Bill of Rights and Responsibilities, and that progress continues on a potential Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland.

## Overview of key issues

The following overview addresses six of the Committee's concluding observations following the examination on the basis of those themes that the Committee dedicated most time to, whether they requested follow-up on implementation, and whether the final recommendation could be considered specific and implementable within a certain timeframe. Each is assessed according to how they were addressed in the examination, including the initial views of the State, questions, comments and responses provided.

The UK delegation was very co-operative and responded to the questions and issues raised by the Committee with great detail and sufficient statistics. Requests were however made to send written responses on questions about progressive realisation of rights, Northern Ireland and the Irish language, which the Committee accepted within a 24-hour deadline.

## Constitutional and legislative framework

The Committee urges the State party to ensure that the Covenant is given full legal effect in its domestic law, that the Covenant rights are made justiciable, and that effective remedies are available for victims of all violations of economic, social and cultural rights. The Committee reiterates its recommendation that, irrespective of the system through which international law is incorporated in the domestic legal order (monism or dualism), following ratification of an international instrument, the State party is under a legal

obligation to comply with such an instrument and to give it full effect in its domestic legal order. In this respect, the Committee again draws the attention of the State party to its General Comment No. 9 (1998) on the domestic application of the Covenant.<sup>3</sup>

Several committee members<sup>4</sup> touched on the justiciability of economic, social and cultural rights and the advent of the new Optional Protocol to the Covenant. Mr. Riedel and Mr. Pillay reiterated concern expressed in the Committee's previous concluding observations that, despite the adoption of a wide range of laws with regard to economic, social and cultural rights, the Covenant has still not been incorporated into the domestic legal order and cannot be directly invoked before the courts. Mr. Riedel explained that the UK is not only bound at the international level but also at national level. He pointed out that the Committee would not take away responsibility from the national Parliament but it was their duty to ensure that the policies decided on are in compliance with the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*. Mr. Atangana and Mr. Zhan further inquired into which rights would not be included in domestic law and which would be progressively incorporated into the law.

Ms Rosemary Davies from the Ministry of Justice explained that the UK approach to giving effect to international obligations has not been to directly incorporate them but to create a national law relating to it, with the exception of the European Convention of Human Rights whose international obligations have been directly applied.. She stated that the UK Government is committed to the progressive attainment of economic, social and cultural rights and even though they do not express rights this in terms of the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, they do protect those rights therein. She maintained, however, that the UK is not going to make economic, social and cultural rights directly enforceable as people "have so many already" Mr. Pillay reiterating Mr. Antagana's question asked the delegation to explain its understanding of the progressive realisation of economic, social and cultural rights and spell out which rights would be progressively realised and which ones were adopted straight away. In response, the delegation asked for permission to send in a written response at a later date.

In relation to the UK's recently launched consultation on a UK Bill of Rights and Responsibilities, Committee members Mr. Riedel, Ms Gomes and Mr. Pillay inquired whether the Bill included economic, social and cultural rights and stressed the importance of the inclusion of these rights. Mr. Zhan questioned the purpose of this Bill of Rights. Ms Davies explained that the green paper on rights and responsibilities was the basis for consultation, and this recognised that economic, social and cultural rights do not have the same constitutional status as civil and political rights. The paper suggests that the UK Government might include new laws on equality and covers a wide range of options on the basis of enforcing the rights of the individual, In addition, she reaffirmed that the UK was not going to make these rights directly enforceable in national law.

Mr. Sadi asked about the Bill of Rights of Northern Ireland and the Government's resistance to adoption of the Bill.. Ms Davies explained that there was no resistance by the UK Government. She referred to the process as a key step toward peace in Northern Ireland but also as an inclusive process, which explained the need for continued analysis and discussion with communities on the issue.

### **Discrimination in enjoyment of ESC rights**

The Committee recommends that the State party takes remedial steps to enforce existing legal prohibitions of discrimination and to enact, without delay, a comprehensive anti-discrimination law, guaranteeing protection against discrimination in the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights, as stipulated in article 2(2) of the Covenant. It also recommends that the State party consider making such comprehensive

<sup>3</sup> Concluding observations, available at <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cescr/docs/AdvanceVersions/E-C12-GBR-CO-5.doc>, at para 13

<sup>4</sup> Mr. Riedel, Mr. Pillay, Mr. Kedzia Mr. Atangana and Mr. Kerdoun

anti-discrimination legislation applicable to Northern Ireland.<sup>5</sup>

Committee member Mr. Zdislaw Kedzia expressed concern that those who are well-off have a clear set of tools to protect their rights while the less well-off seem to face more challenges and have a lower capacity for redress. He also questioned the presence of a legal assistance scheme specifically available for social minorities.

Ms Davies explained that a large amount of legal aid has been set aside to guarantee a right to legal representation for minorities in cases where their economic, social and cultural rights have been violated.

Dr. Vijay spoke about a number of areas in which discrimination in the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights has been dealt with by the Government. He claimed that the market is increasingly designed to encourage women, parents and older workers and those with disabilities to be economically active with fair standards and support for people when they move between jobs. The Government has embarked on a programme to combat abuse of worker rights and ensure that all workers, including migrant workers, have access to their rights and an improved enforcement framework. Equal health and education reforms have been made across the UK to ensure inclusion all major ethnic groups

### Housing

The Committee calls upon the State party, in line with its General Comment No. 4 (1991) on the right to adequate housing, to intensify its efforts to ensure that everyone has access to housing and to review its policies and develop effective strategies, including a gender impact assessment, aimed at increasing the levels of affordable housing, including social housing. The Committee also recommends that the State party take into consideration the Homelessness Scotland Act 2003 as best practice, especially its provision relating to the right to housing as an enforceable right.<sup>6</sup>

Mr. Pillay addressed the issue of the chronic shortage of social housing among disadvantaged groups of people. Referring to statistics from the previous review where 80% of Catholics in Northern Belfast were on the waiting lists for social housing, he noted that by 2008 73% were still on the waiting lists. He also drew attention to the lack of housing for people with disabilities in Scotland and noted that 230,000 additional properties were needed and required adaptation to the needs of persons with disabilities. On a more positive note, Mr. Pillay commended the adoption of the 2003 *Scotland Homelessness Act* and inquired into the general enforceability of the right to housing.

Ms Helen Keats from the Department of Communities and Local government responded to the Committee's concern on the situation of housing. She began by acknowledging the UK Government's awareness of the waiting list issues for social housing and explained its intention to provide new social houses with an investment of over £8 billion (GBP).

Regarding the situation of homelessness, the *Homelessness Act* of 1996 was renewed in 2002 with the establishment of the *Priority Needs Order Act* and continues to legally enforce the right to housing in the UK. According to Ms Keats, there has been a 62% reduction in homelessness in England and targets have been set to reduce the figure of 1001 homeless people by 50% by 2010, with half of the local authorities having already met these targets. There has also been a noted reduction in the number of 16-17 year olds in interim accommodation, with figures going down from 1000 to 330 in 2008.

Ms Keats further explained the high number of homeless people who continue to appear in the statistics even though they do not meet the criteria of homeless people, claiming that "not everybody that is homeless is eligible for social housing." Homeless people that do not fit the criteria for social housing receive assistance

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., at para 16.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., at para 29

from the local authorities in the form of homelessness prevention advice but they continue to distort the statistics.

Ms Keats also explained that a ‘pathfinders’ programme has been established to reduce overcrowding in public housing and the public rented sector, but that plans to tackle the private rented sector have not yet been initiated. She stressed the need for prevention of homelessness to be extended to people not under the homeless category, such as private homeowners who will need help with the existing financial crisis to prevent future cases of homelessness.

Mr. Brian Peddie also touched on the subject of housing in Scotland. The *2003 Scotland Homeless Act* is in full effect and applications for housing are assessed with statutory criteria against the categories of needs for housing. Plans to remove the categories of need under the statutory criteria by 2012 are in place. Mr Peddie drew attention to the need for an increase in housing for disabled people in Scotland and disclosed the Government’s plans to provide registered landlords with £ 12- 15 million to ensure housing is adjusted in order to facilitate persons with disabilities.

Unfortunately a representative from Northern Ireland was not available to provide information on housing issues, especially in Northern Belfast as raised by Mr. Pillay, but a promise was made to send a written response at a later date.

### **Employment / right to work**

The Committee, in line with its General Comment No. 16 (2005) on the equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of all economic, social and cultural rights, recommends that the State party conduct a comprehensive review of its policies to overcome gender inequalities. It also recommends that the State party continue intensifying its efforts to enhance equality between men and women in the work place, particularly with regard to equal pay for work of equal value in all sectors of employment. The Committee encourages the State party to take into consideration the findings of the inquiry to be conducted by the Equality and Human Rights Commission and to ensure that the Equality Bill contain effective provisions aimed at closing the wage gap in the private sector.<sup>7</sup>

Committee members Mr. Kedzia, Mr. Phillippe Texier, Mr. Sergei Martynov and Mr. Mohamed Abel-Moneim were concerned about the UK’s reservations on Articles 6 and 7 of the Covenant and expressed interest in the removal of these reservations. Article 6 of the Covenant concerns that right of everybody to gain his living by work and Article 7 concerns the right of everybody to enjoy just and favourable conditions of work.<sup>8</sup> Mr. Kedzia referred to the reservation on Article 7 as “a worrying reservation”, which meant that the UK accepted the discrimination of unequal pay.

Mr. Jerry Oppenheim from the Home Office explained that the reservation on Article 6 existed to stop people inferring that they have the right to work. Once they have permission to stay in the county, they gain the right to work. Dr. Vijay further explained that the key elements for the labour market policies of the UK were in conformity with Article 6.

Mr Tony Strutt from the Government Equalities Office shed light on the 28.3% wage gap in the private sector but began by stating that the wage gap between men and women in the public sector had gone down from 22.6% to 21% from 2006 to 2007. According to him, the variations in pay, especially in the private sector, are based on where people are in their careers, age difference and also gender difference regarding full and part-

<sup>7</sup> Concluding observations available, at <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cescr/docs/AdvanceVersions/E-C12-GBR-CO-5.doc> at para 18

<sup>8</sup> Text available at <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/cescr.htm#part3>

employment, with women requiring more part-time employment in than men. He claimed that inquiries are now underway, however, concerning the significant pay gap in the financial sector. The Government is also working with the Human Rights Commission and trade unions to encourage the private sector to provide more data on wage gaps, as it believes that more transparency in this sector will assist in dealing with the problem.

The Committee recommends that the State party strengthen its measures to reduce the substantial number of unemployed persons and to counteract the impact of the economic downturn on employment in order to realize the full realization of the right to work, in particular with regard to the most disadvantaged and marginalized individuals and groups. It also calls upon the State party to reinforce its measures aimed at ensuring that persons with disabilities, including those with learning disabilities, have equal opportunities for productive and gainful employment, equal pay for work of equal value, and provide them with improved, expanded and equal opportunities to gain the necessary qualifications, in line with its General Comment No. 5 (1994) on persons with disabilities.<sup>9</sup>

Committee members Mr. Texier and Mr. Martynov also raised concern about the substantial number of people unemployed, in particular, among the ethnic minorities and persons with disabilities. Mr Brendan O’Gorman from the Department of Work and Pensions explained that rights to protect persons with disabilities in the workplace continue to exist and help is given to them in cases where they are unemployed. In addition, programmes that directly help persons with disabilities get access to help in getting work have been put in place. There is also extra assistance and advice provided in cases of when they are out of work. Until 1995 the Government monitored the number of persons with disabilities in employment but the practice has then been stopped because people were unhappy that this required registration. This accounts for the lack of statistics in this regard. On estimation, however, about 3% of the larger employers would comprise of persons with disabilities.

In regard to unemployment among ethnic minorities, the Committee recommends that the State party takes immediate and appropriate measures to reduce unemployment among ethnic minorities and to provide them with better employment opportunities.<sup>10</sup>

Another representative from the Department of Work and Pensions, Mr. Nahid Majid, discussed the issues of employment among ethnic minorities who make up 8% of the total population in the UK and constitute 11% of the total working age population. He told the Committee that outreach programmes have been set up to help ethnic minorities find employment, and are focused on deprived city areas. He claimed that £30 million (GBP) was spent on the city pathfinders strategies in 2007-2008 and £105 million (GBP) had been invested towards employment for 2009- 2010.

Mr Majid spoke about the economic slowdown which has affected employment, with 157,000 jobs lost by January 2009. As a result of the crisis, unemployment skills services have been integrated into the employment sector. He pointed out the need for the labour market to revamp its strategies to help people sustain work and that extra funds would be allocated to employers to support them through this process.

## Health

In line with General Comment No. 14 (2000) on the right to the highest attainable standard of health, the

<sup>9</sup> Concluding observations are available, at <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cescr/docs/AdvanceVersions/E-C12-GBR-CO-5.doc> at para 20

<sup>10</sup> Concluding observations available, at <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cescr/docs/AdvanceVersions/E-C12-GBR-CO-5.doc> at para 21

Committee recommends that the State party intensify its efforts to overcome the health inequalities and unequal access to health care, in particular for the most disadvantaged and marginalized individuals and groups. It also urges the State Party in this regard to fulfil its commitment to reduce health inequalities by 10% by 2010, measured by infant mortality and life expectancy at birth as benchmarks which the State party has set for itself. It also recommends that the State party gather appropriate disaggregated data on an annual basis of the reporting cycle in this respect with a view to assessing the progress made and providing such information to the Committee in its next periodic report.<sup>11</sup>

Mr. Riedel addressed the issue of inequality in access to health services based on social classes. He questioned the treatment of persons with intellectual disabilities and the measures in place to increase access to health care in deprived areas. In addition, he expressed concern about the low life expectancy rate of males in Glasgow. He criticised the high suicide rate and the large number of mental health patients among prisoners in Northern Ireland. High cases of Dementia and Alzheimer's were noted among the elderly as well as the lack of training among health professionals to deal with these diseases.

Mr. Mark Joannides spoke on behalf of the Department of Health in relation to the health inequalities in the poorest areas in the UK amongst men and women. He expressed that the Government has set targets to reduce health inequalities by 10% by 2010-2011. Mr. Joannides pointed out that over 200 health teams across the UK are available for all prisoners including those with mental health problems and the progress of these health teams is reviewed annually by a monitoring board. He informed the Committee that as a top priority £110 billion (GBP) has been allocated towards the National Health Service framework to reduce inequalities by 2010-2011.

Concerning health inequalities in Scotland, Mr Brian Peddie spoke about supporting services such as the 'Keep Well' programme, a key priority for the Scottish Government focused on strengthening and enhancing primary care services in deprived areas to reduce health inequalities. Framework measures have also been established to tackle the alcohol misuse in Scotland as a contributor to low life expectancy. Surveys have illustrated that 50% of Scottish men drink above the limit and £120 million (GBP) has been invested to tackle alcohol misuse and reduce the numbers by 20% by 2013.

### Public awareness

The Committee recommends that the State party take effective measures to increase awareness of economic, social and cultural rights among the public at large as well as among judges, public officials, police and law enforcement officials, medical practitioners, and other health-care related professionals, including by lending adequate support to civil society and national human rights institutions in their efforts in relation to awareness-raising. It also recommends that the State party take steps to improve awareness of the Covenant rights as justiciable human rights and not merely rights as part of the "Welfare State."<sup>12</sup>

Mr. Pillay requested more information on methods used to increase awareness of economic, social and cultural rights among the public, but also particularly among judges, public officials and law enforcement officials. Contrary to information given by the delegation, the three human rights national human rights commissions disagree with the position that the levels of UK public awareness on economic, social and cultural rights are high.

Mr. John Kissane explained in detail about the awareness programme undertaken for public officials, where 150,000 pamphlets have been created to counteract myths in the media about human rights. The UK

<sup>11</sup> Concluding observations available, at <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cescr/docs/AdvanceVersions/E-C12-GBR-CO-5.doc> at para 32

<sup>12</sup> Concluding observations available, at <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cescr/docs/AdvanceVersions/E-C12-GBR-CO-5.doc> at para 15

Government has also co-operated with the British Institute of Human Rights and human rights are now part of the education syllabus. Mr. Kissane acknowledged that the general public was unaware of the rights as set forth in the Covenant but expressed that, ‘generally speaking’, people understand what their rights are.

A brochure titled ‘Human Rights in Healthcare’ has also been circulated among hospitals and healthcare facilities’ staff as well as holding an event on working skills for health to train staff on economic, social and cultural rights of patients.

In addition to education on economic, social and cultural rights, Mr. Kerdoun expressed concern about the disparities in terms of school performance and high drop-out rates particularly among the Roma/Gypsies and Irish travellers. He questioned measures adopted to reduce school-drop outs, the support given to these travellers to ensure their integration into the education system and asked for a break down of the current school drop-out rate among minorities.

The Committee recommends that the State party adopt all appropriate measures to reduce the achievement gap in terms of school performance between British pupils and pupils belonging to ethnic, religious or national minorities in the field of education, by ensuring the adequate provision of English-language courses for those students who lack adequate language proficiency and avoiding the over-representation of minority students in classes for children with learning difficulties. The Committee further recommends that the State party undertake further studies on the correlation between school failure and social environment, with a view to elaborating effective strategies aimed at reducing the disproportionate drop-out rates affecting minority pupils.<sup>13</sup>

Ms Annette Warwick from the Department of Children, Schools and Families pointed out that surveys showed that young white people were more likely to participate in education between the ages of 16-19 compared to ethnic minorities. Statistics showed a high representation of mixed white Caribbean and black Caribbean students among those excluded from education.

The establishment of the *2006 Education and Inspections Act* was intended for local authorities to identify children that were missing suitable education. In addition, targets to make education mandatory until the age of 17 by 2013 and until the age of 18 by 2015 have been set up by the UK Government. It was stated that in February 2008 the Department for Children, Schools and Families started a guide for Gypsy/Roma students with strategies for building confidence, and £207 million (GBP) has been allocated towards education for 2010-2011 in order to close the gaps in education among minorities.

### Other issues not reflected in concluding observations

Committee members Mr Zdislaw Kedzia and Mr Philippe Texier, raised concerns with the UK delegation relating to **asylum seekers**, especially those that have been refused asylum or those awaiting a decision, drawing attention to long procedural delays, and the fact that they do not have access to the labour market or health care.

Mr. Mandy Mayer from the Department for Business, Enterprise & Regulatory Reform claimed that the problem of procedural delays had been resolved. Unsuccessful asylum applicants are eligible under section 4 of the 1999 *Immigration and Asylum Act*, to continued support until they can return to their home country. He provided the example of 13,500 asylum seekers in Leeds availing themselves of this option, and further added that secondary health care is available for anyone needing immediate medical attention if they cannot wait to receive treatment in their home country.

<sup>13</sup> Concluding observations are available, at <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cescr/docs/AdvanceVersions/E-C12-GBR-CO-5.doc> at para 36

## Conclusions and next steps

In closing Dr Vijay expressed his gratitude to members of the Committee for their interest in details of the UK system. He showed appreciation to the members of the delegation, members of civil society and the representatives from UK Overseas Territories that could not attend but provided information. He acknowledged that a lot of work still has to be done and invited Committee members to bring their expertise to consultations for the UK Bill of Rights.

The Committee requested that the State party submit its sixth periodic report prepared in accordance with the revised reporting guidelines of the Committee by 30 June 2014.

## **TREATY BODY MONITOR STAFF**

**Eléonore Dziurzynski**, Communications Officer, Geneva

**Gareth Sweeney**, Deputy Manager, Geneva

**Katrine Thomassen**, Manager, Geneva

**Michael Ineichen**, Human Rights Officer, Geneva

**Michelle Evans**, Representative to the UN, New York

**Vanessa Jackson**, Human Rights Officer, New York

## **AUTHOR OF THE UNITED KINGDDOM REPORT**

**Mabel Kirabo**, Intern

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