



Feedback from session on Human Rights

Below is a summary of the key issues raised during a consultation session held with a range of grass roots organisations in the North West facilitated by Community Dialogue and the North West Community Network.

Bill of Rights

There should be a shared Bill of Rights for all sections of our society with no one left out.

The Bill of Rights has to be seen as valid and a priority for the politicians.

The Bill of Rights has to have an impact on our day to day lives.

The Bill of Rights should reflect international standards e.g. Scotland's declared their international obligations to Human Rights Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations 9 core human rights instruments. NI should learn from other international human rights best practices.

Inequality

Welfare Reform has violated a wide range of human rights. It has taken away people's dignity and doesn't consider the person as an individual or human being. This can demoralise people. They also can get stuck in the system. There is a lack of motivation and support as a result.

Covid has also shone a light on inequalities that are already there. Families are struggling in different ways to cope. For example in relation to home schooling, not all families have access to a laptop or the internet which is a vital requirement in being able to access education on-line.

There are many ethnic minority communities who work in the Health Service. Covid has amplified their issues around vulnerability.

Many of those living in Public Housing Estates or High Rise flats have little or no access to play facilities or green spaces. The nearest park may require using public transport or taxis which can place a burden on their expenditure for those on low incomes.

Disabled and Older People

Society refers to the issues facing disabled people and older people as unmet need or worse still the term “special needs”, portraying disabled people and older people as a financial burden. These constituencies are not understood in the context of human rights. They have needs rather than considered by the state as holders of human rights. When referring to disabled and older people as having unmet needs, this shows the importance of having a Bill of Human Rights.

Human Rights have to relate to everyday life that affects people on an ongoing basis.

The impact of Covid has discriminated against older people due to impact of shielding and access to services. They have had very little freedom of choice. As a result of shielding they are not able to see their families which leads to loneliness and isolation which in turn can affect their mental health. They have difficulty having access to GP and other health services more so than before Covid.

Young People

Young people are overwhelmed and are under pressure to complete their courses. There should be more emphasis on how to survive rather than just concentrating on academic work. Also there is a lack of investment on education for young people.

Many young people have mental health needs which youth service provision attempts to address but it also needs to be sustainable, particularly in light of the potential implications of the pandemic which has put a lot of stress and pressure on young people. The Bill of Rights needs to recognise a Rights Based approach for young people in terms of service provision and recognise that there are various services that are unique to those young people.

Climate Issues

We need to address climate issues as part and parcel of the Bill of Rights by also addressing the Rights of Nature. The idea of including rights of nature into a Bill of Rights for humans is that if humans are to be guaranteed their human rights such as the right to life then the rights of nature must also be protected. For example if water is contaminated by pollution from industrial waste and people drink this becoming ill possibly dying then the right to life has been compromised.

If the Rights of Nature are recognised then water will have the right to be clean and free from contamination.

The same Right of Nature can be applied to air. Everybody has a right to inhale clean air and in order for this to happen the air itself must have the right to be clean. Air quality, especially in big cities and near industrial sites where people who are poor tend to live, is bad and getting worse. This causes numerous respiratory problems and also contributes to increasing inequality between rich and poor in terms of life expectancy and quality of life.

In 2010 Bolivia implemented a draft law of Mother Earth to establish new Rights of Nature which included:

- The right not to have cellular structure modified or genetically altered

- The right to continue vital cycles and process is free from human alteration
- The right to pure water
- The right to clean air
- The right to be free of toxic and radioactive pollution
- The right not to be affected by mega infrastructure and development projects that affect the balance of ecosystems and the local inhabitant communities .

Indigenous belief is that 'Pachamama' is a level being not a mere thing. The basic idea is that the planet was here a long time before humans came along and we have no right to claim ownership, our roles are stewards of the earth and all who live here.