**THE STATE OF CHILDREN’S RIGHTS IN NORTHERN IRELAND**

**HIGHLIGHTED IN UNITED NATIONS REPORT**

The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child set out their recommendations to the government today following examination of the child rights record of the UK government and the NI Executive in Geneva last month.

 A delegation led by the Children’s Law Centre and Save the Children attended the session, in which the Committee of experts examined government representatives on compliance with their child rights obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

 Orlaith Minogue, Policy, Advocacy and Campaigns Officer for Save the Children in Northern Ireland said, “With one in four children in Northern Ireland living in poverty, and with child poverty set to rise, it comes as no surprise that the UN Committee has expressed concern at the high child poverty rates across the UK, nor their observation that children in Northern Ireland are among those worse affected. We welcome the Committee’s recommendation that the government undertake a comprehensive assessment of the cumulative impact of the full range of recent social security reforms on children”.

 “In light of the Executive’s debate on early years earlier this week, we note the UN Committee’s concern that many children living in poverty do not meet the expected level of language development at pre-school level, which has a negative impact on their primary education and hinders their development throughout their life. The Committee’s recommendation that the State allocate ‘sufficient resources for the development and expansion of early childhood care and education, with special attention to the children in the most vulnerable situations’ is accurate and timely.”

 Welcoming the Committee’s thoughtful and comprehensive concluding observations and recommendations Paddy Kelly, Director of the Children’s Law Centre said “There are many of the Committee’s recommendations which are specifically directed at the Northern Ireland Executive. I welcome a recommendation from the Committee to expedite the enactment of a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland and to prohibit the use of Tasers and AEPs on children.  They also note the proposal of the last NI administration to introduce age discrimination but only for those over 16 and went on to recommend our government consider providing protections for all children on the grounds of their age.”

 She continued, “Recognising the significant mental health needs of our children and the trans-generational impact of our conflict on their mental health we note the Committee’s observations that the number of child suicides has been steadily increasing in Northern Ireland in the past 10 years and welcome their recommendations in respect of mental health.  We had raised concerns that only 7.8% of our mental health budget is spent on child and adolescent mental health services. We are particularly pleased that in response the Committee has recommended a rigorous investment in child and adolescent mental health services and the development of strategies with particular attention to vulnerable children such as children living in poverty, children in care and children in the criminal justice system.”

 Joe Higginson, aged 17 from the Northern Ireland Youth Forum attended to represent the views of young people in Northern Ireland. Joe said, “I thought the trip to Geneva was really eye opening, in that I saw the Government being held directly to account and scrutinized.  I thought the process of the conference was very interesting, with UN committee members asking as many questions as possible in the time given.”

 We hope the NI Executive will take the UN Committee’s recommendations seriously and implement them through the new Programme for Government.

**- Ends -**

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**Notes for Editors:**

[UNCRC Reports for 2015 – 2016 can be downloaded here](http://www.childrenslawcentre.org.uk/index.php/component/zoo/item/bbc-broadcast-appeal-for-clc-copy-2-copy). The views of NGOs were gathered through a series of consultation workshops conducted between November 2014 and March 2015.  The report also includes the views of children, which were collected through an online survey of 752 children and a thorough series of consultative workshops and interviews.  A separate report was submitted by young people from Northern Ireland “[NI Young People's Report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, June 2015](http://www.childrenslawcentre.org.uk/images/Northern_Ireland_Young_Peoples_Report_2015_30.06.15.pdf)”.