

3 April 2020

Dear Convenor of the Equalities and Human Rights Committee, Ruth Maguire MSP,

Coronavirus and Human Rights

"COVID-19 is a test for our societies, and we are all learning and adapting as we respond to the virus. Human dignity and rights need to be front and centre in that effort, not an afterthought"
Michele Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

These are unprecedented times, and all of us are dealing with very significant impacts on many of our basic human rights. Government is having to make difficult decisions about what is necessary and proportionate to protect people's right to life and right to health. The Parliament has had to deal quickly with many significant issues that would usually be the subject of extensive consultation before such drastic changes are made. Public bodies are changing dramatically how they operate, redeploying staff and resource, putting to one-side certain normal processes in order to respond flexibly to this public health crisis.


Our members are concerned that in all of these significant changes, we must make sure that law, policy and practice responses do not derogate from human rights protections unnecessarily. We must make sure that no one is ignored or discriminated against in this decision-making. We must make sure that restrictions on our freedoms are legitimate, proportionate, necessary, understood and time-limited. Concerningly, significant human rights infringements that appear to be discriminatory or disproportionate are already being raised by many of our members.

The Equalities and Human Rights Committee has an extremely valuable role to play at this time, enabling effective, full and reality-grounded scrutiny of Government decision-making. The Committee is a vital part of the Scottish Parliament as a human rights guarantor. We are writing to ask that the Committee begin an urgent inquiry into the Coronavirus and Human Rights and Equalities to hold the Government to account and to ultimately help to strengthen good decision-making. This inquiry should continue throughout this current crisis, as well as shape the country we become after it ends.

If it would assist the Committee, the Consortium would be happy to convene online meetings of civil society to discuss specific human rights concerns about the coronavirus response with members of the Committee.

We look forward to hearing from you

Yours sincerely



Mhairi Snowden

Coordinator, Human Rights Consortium Scotland