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29 August 2008

Dear Baroness Tonge and Ms. McCafferty,

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, with reference to your letter of 28 July 2008, presents its compliment to the UK All Party Parliamentary Group on Population, Development and Reproductive Health for its commitment to the human rights of women of all ages, particularly in relation to the right to health and sexual and reproductive rights.

As the principal human rights body of the United Nations secretariat, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) is not in a position nor mandated to provide statistical or epidemiological data or evidence relation to specific women's health areas mentioned in your letter of 28 July 2008. However, as an important framework for the hearings, OHCHR would like to draw to your attention some of the most relevant international human rights standards governing the various topics listed in your request for information. OHCHR particularly encourages the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, as a State party to relevant international human rights treaties, to carefully consider, disseminate and implement the most recent observations or recommendations made to the State party in relation to these rights by international human rights treaty monitoring bodies.

In relation to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights the Committee adopted its most recent concluding observations in 2002 (E/C.12/1/Add.79, 5 June 2002), which specifically addressed the issue of HIV in paragraph 40, notably "urg[ing] the State party to ensure the availability of, and equal access to, anti-retroviral medication for all individuals in Overseas Dependent Territories". In paragraph 38, the Committee has recommended that the State party take the necessary measures to ensure that homeless persons suffering from serious health problems receive adequate health care. Since some of the health conditions referred to in your letter could occur and be aggravated by homelessness of women, the State party would need to give particular consideration to this observation by the Committee.

Ms. Christine McCafferty MP
Chair, APPG
Hon. Baroness Tonge
Chair, Hearing Steering Committee
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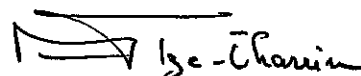
Regarding the concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination under article 9 of the Convention (CERD/C/63/CO/11, 10 December 2003, paragraphs 23 and 24), when reviewing the situation of the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland, the Committee expressed concern about the discrimination faced by Roma/Gypsies/Travellers that is reflected, inter alia, in [...] limited access to health services. The Committee drew the attention of the State party to its general recommendation XXVII on discrimination against Roma and recommended that the State party develop further appropriate modalities of communication and dialogue between Roma/Gypsy/Traveller communities and central authorities. Furthermore, the Committee reiterated its concern that other minority groups or individuals belonging to them experience discrimination in the area of health. The Committee urged the State party to continue taking affirmative measures in accordance with article 2, paragraph 2, of the Convention to ensure equal opportunities for full enjoyment of their economic, social and cultural rights, inter alia, of the right to health, without discrimination.

Regarding the observations by the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC/C/15/Add.135, 16 October 2000, paragraphs 37 and 44.), a reference is made to the efforts undertaken by the State party to reduce the number of teenage pregnancies, although the Committee remains concerned at their high rate. The Committee recommends that the State party take further necessary measures to reduce the rate of teenage pregnancies, particularly in overseas territories, through, inter alia, making health education, including sex education, part of the school curricula, making contraception available to all children, and improving access to confidential and adolescent-sensitive advice and information and other appropriate support (as recommended by the independent Advisory Group on Teenage Pregnancy). The Committee further suggests that a comprehensive and multi-disciplinary study be undertaken to understand the scope of adolescent health problems, including the special situation of children infected with, affected by or vulnerable to HIV/AIDS and STDs. Additionally, it is recommended that the State party undertake further measures, including the allocation of adequate human and financial resources, to develop youth-friendly care, counselling, and rehabilitation services for adolescents in all the Overseas Territories.

Finally, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights would like to suggest two further references in the form of annexes. The first one is on selected international human rights standards relating to women's right to health, including sexual and reproductive rights (Annex 1). The second reference (Annex 2) is to one of reports of the former Special Rapporteur on the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, Mr. Paul Hunt, who devoted attention to the issue of maternal mortality from a human rights perspective. Annex 2 refers to Special Rapporteur's report the General Assembly in 2006 (A/61/338, 13 September, 2006).

I would welcome any further information on the outcomes of your deliberations, particularly in view of the human rights aspects that have been put forward for your consideration.

Yours sincerely,



Maria-Francisca Ize-Charrin, Officer in Charge
Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights