The Scottish Human Rights Commission

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL
25 SESSION
ITEM 3
13 March 2014

Annual full-day meeting on the rights of the child (HRC res. 22/32)

Mr. President,
Distinguished delegates,

The Scottish Human Rights Commission welcomes this discussion. Following our four year research project into the human rights situation in Scotland, we identified enhancing respect, protection and fulfillment of human rights to achieve justice and safety for all as one of our key priorities.

Scotland has a unique system for addressing the needs of children who commit offences through its welfare based children’s hearing system, placing the best interest of the child at the centre of decision making and also giving life to the right to respect for the views of the child. However, we also have one of the lowest ages of criminal responsibility in the world at just eight years. Early intervention to prevent offending should be increased, as should alternatives to detention for children.

Children still face barriers in terms of accessing legal advice, including costs and choice of representation. The impact of austerity measures, in particular welfare reform and legal aid cuts are disproportionately affecting children.

More must be done to protect children in Scotland from violence, including repealing the defence of "justifiable assault", enhancing parenting support and improving child protection measures.

We hope that Scotland will address these issues through Scotland’s first National Action Plan for Human Rights which was launched on 10 December 2013. We look forward to assessing how much progress has been made at the UK’s UPR mid-term report later this year.

Thank you.