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Dear Convener,

Work Programme Priorities from the Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights

The Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights (CRER) extends its sincere appreciation for your engagement with third sector groups over the past few months. We hope it has been a beneficial exercise for the Committee as you formulate your work programme for the parliamentary term.

As you may recall, CRER participated in the breakfast meeting and evidence session held on 8th September, during which we highlighted our priorities for the coming years. CRER also submitted a letter to the Committee on 29th June, which also offered four key topics for consideration. Following on from the conclusion of the Committee's initial roundtable meetings, CRER has compiled a summary of areas of work we hope the Committee may consider in the years ahead.

Race Equality Framework for Scotland

Firstly, we ask the Committee to scrutinise the implementation and monitoring of the Race Equality Framework for Scotland 2016-2030. This piece of work seeks to address the inequality and discrimination faced by minority ethnic communities in spheres such as community cohesion, justice, participation, representation, education, employment, income, housing, and health. If its aspirations for the next fifteen years are met, significant positive change will occur. However, if the Scottish Government and agencies do not adhere to its commitments and goals, minority ethnic communities will continue to be unjustly treated in Scottish society with fundamental rights ignored. The Committee would be a powerful force in ensuring the ideals and goals of the Framework are enacted.

As you will know, the Scottish Government has committed to appointing a Race Equality Framework Advisor to help implement the actions in the Framework. CRER asks that the Committee meet early with this Advisor (and regularly thereafter) to discuss the Advisor's remit, transparency, and impartiality.

Discrimination

Secondly, we ask the Committee to consider racial discrimination in employment. As employment affects several other areas of disadvantage, such as social capital and income, we believe that not monitoring and encouraging the implementation of the recommendations of Removing Barriers: Race, Ethnicity, and Employment would be a wasted opportunity for the Committee. Similarly, the equalities aspects of the Fair Work Framework 2016 may also be of interest to the Committee.

If you don't challenge racism—who will?

Furthermore, we believe the Committee would benefit from looking at entrenched racial discrimination throughout other areas of public life, particularly education, criminal justice, and representation. The Concluding Observations of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination¹ detail these and other issues and offer recommendations directly to the Scottish Government.

Hate Crime and Prejudice-Based Bullying

Furthermore, we request that the Committee consider hate speech, hate crime, and prejudice-based bullying. Several organisations including the Equality and Human Rights Commission, Stonewall Scotland, Enable Scotland, Engender, Interfaith Scotland, Saheliya, and LGBT Youth Scotland have also raised these issues, as has the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Racist hate crime continues to be the most frequently reported hate crime and, as such, continues to be a significant issue for minority ethnic communities. Ensuring the recommendations of the Scottish Government's Independent Advisory Group on Hate Crime, Prejudice, and Community Cohesion are taken forward would, we believe, be a valuable exercise for the Committee and would benefit many communities affected by hate crime.

Furthermore, CRER, the Equality and Human Rights Commission, and the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination have called for research and guidance on wide-spread prejudice-based bullying in Scotland's schools. Better understanding is needed of the extent of the problem and the effectiveness of school's approaches to tackling prejudiced-based bullying. The Committee could investigate this issue and offer recommendations for initiatives and strategies to ensure Scottish schools not only address bullying, but also the particular challenges of prejudice-based bullying.

Public Sector Equality Duties

CRER and other organisations such as Engender, the Equality Network, and Close the Gap have called for a review of the Public Sector Equality Duties and equality impact assessments. Our research demonstrates that the requirements have not been met and that, when information is collected, it is rarely used. We share your concern that equality impact assessments are not utilised properly and are treated as a paperwork exercise rather than a genuine attempt to identify potential areas of inequality. A review of this, following the April 2017 reporting, may serve to further clarify these shortfalls and identify potential improvements.

CRER and SEMPER Scotland have also called for positive action to be reviewed, with an emphasis on detailing steps public bodies and private sector employers could take to advance equality. Very few public bodies employ positive action measures, which we believe are necessary to achieve equality for disadvantaged groups.

Poverty

Minority ethnic individuals are twice as likely to be in poverty as white individuals, affected by lower rates of employment (despite higher attainment rates) and lower pay. As such, we view poverty as an equality issue and one the Committee may wish to consider. Other equality groups facing disproportionate rates of poverty, such as religious minorities, older people, and women, have also highlighted this as an area of concern. We would encourage the Committee to consider not only poverty in Scotland, but poverty as it affects equality groups, including minority ethnic communities.

It is clear from the data that poverty and ethnicity are connected, and yet anti-poverty agendas often do not adequately reflect this. The "Shifting the Curve" report for the First Minister from the Independent Advisor on Poverty and Inequality noted that while minority ethnic groups are often the most disadvantaged and may have additional barriers to face in escaping poverty, there would not be "detailed

¹ Available here: http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CERD/Shared%20Documents/GBR/CERD_C_GBR_CO_21-23_24985_E.pdf

work on these groups at this stage.” This effectively parked discussion of the connections between race and poverty and we ask that the Committee continue this conversation to bring about action and change.

CRER agrees with MECOPP’s analysis of equality and poverty as offered in the evidence session on 6th October: the strength of evidence surrounding poverty, but not equality aspects of poverty, can leave some communities at a distinct disadvantage. The causes, experiences, and routes out of poverty for minority ethnic groups are under-researched and policies rarely reflect the particular challenges facing non-white minority ethnic communities. The Equality and Human Rights Committee could ensure that the voices of those facing disproportionate levels of poverty are heard and incorporated into policy, legislation, and initiatives.

Alongside this, we are aware that the Scottish Government intends to introduce the socio-economic public sector duty in 2017. This must be carefully considered and implemented to ensure that it does not supersede or eclipse equality duties already in place.

Data collection and monitoring

A robust focus on data collection and monitoring could aid the Committee in these efforts. Evidence based policy is a necessity. While a wealth of qualitative and quantitative information on the topics we have outlined has been produced by the Scottish Government, Scottish Parliament, public sector, and third sector bodies, the Committee should encourage more detailed collection and monitoring and highlight areas in which disaggregated information is needed, such as social security and public participation.

Remit

As you can see, there are many pressing race equality issues for consideration over the coming years, many of which are issues for other equality groups as well. The Committee’s agenda will need an equalities focus to make a real difference for these communities. While CRER has highlighted our concerns regarding the expansion of the Committee’s remit, we are encouraged by the promise that the Committee will endeavour to ensure that “[equalities] sectoral issues are not pushed aside to the advantage of human rights.”²

We look forward to working with the Committee to advance equality for minority ethnic groups and ensure the human rights of these communities are upheld and respected. To this aim, we hope the Committee considers the concluding observations from the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, as previously referenced in this letter. Following representation from CRER, the Committee provided recommendations directly to the Scottish Government for the first time. Many of these concluding observations address the issues highlighted in this letter and, we believe, could be utilised to further press the Scottish Government and public bodies to take necessary action. CRER is also happy to provide the Committee with any further research or evidence required.

Thank you again for your time and consideration on these matters. Please do not hesitate to contact CRER if we can be of assistance.

Yours sincerely,

Jatin Haria
Executive Director
Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights

² Equal Opportunities Committee Meeting, 8th September 2016