



First Minister
Scottish Government
St Andrew's House
Regent Road
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

via email: firstminister@gov.scot
Scottish.ministers@gov.scot

19th May 2026

Dear First Minister,

On behalf of the membership of the Human Rights Consortium Scotland, we are writing to congratulate you on your appointment as First Minister.

Scotland's Human Rights Journey and Next Steps

Scotland has continued to show leadership on human rights within the United Kingdom, including the establishment of the Scottish Commission for Human Rights, the work of the National Task Force for Human Rights Leadership, the incorporation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child into Scots law, and the development of Scotland's second National Action Plan for Human Rights.

To build on these achievements, HRCS and our members believe Scotland would benefit greatly from the further incorporation of international human rights standards through the introduction of a Scottish Human Rights Bill, and we welcome your party's manifesto commitment to deliver this. It is essential that the Bill is included in the first Programme for Government after the election and is introduced in the first year of the new Scottish Parliament.

As currently proposed, the Bill will seek to incorporate four human rights treaties with the addition of a right to a healthy environment. The Bill would be transformational for everyone in Scotland, strengthening protections for rights that many need but struggle to realise in practice.

HRCS and our members recognise that developing and progressing the Bill will not be easy; however, the potential benefits for Scotland's most disenfranchised and excluded people would be significant. We stand ready to work in partnership with the Scottish Government and our allies to do everything we can to help make the Bill a reality in the next session of the Scottish Parliament.

In addition, we believe the Scottish Government's commitment to Human Rights could be significantly strengthened by creating a Cabinet Secretary or Minister for Human Rights. Human rights are too often subsumed within the equality, diversity and inclusion portfolio; we believe the time is right for a Scottish Minister whose sole focus is human rights.

This would build on the achievements of the previous Minister for Equalities, who led much of the early development work for the proposed Bill, and would help embed an enhanced, cross-government commitment by giving human rights the profile and focus required to achieve our ambition of a Scottish Human Rights Act.

In summary, we would welcome your support to:

- (1) progress and deliver the Scottish Human Rights Bill in the first Programme for Government and introduced to the Scottish Parliament in its first year and,
- (2) create a dedicated Cabinet Minister for Human Rights to provide the leadership and focus needed to embed this agenda across the Scottish Government and lead on the development of the new Bill.

About the Human Rights Consortium Scotland (HRCS)

Human Rights Consortium Scotland (HRCS) is a human rights defender organisation that exists to defend and promote human rights for everyone in Scotland. We are Scotland's civil society network for human rights, with nearly 500 members.

We work to achieve two strategic outcomes:

- Scotland has a strong, collective civil society voice to defend and promote human rights.

- Civil society can use human rights to strengthen democracy and deliver social justice in Scotland.

In the current external environment, HRCS must contend with - and overcome - several barriers if we are to deliver this strategy. These include the fact that individuals, communities and the public sector often feel disconnected from the human rights framework, and many believe it does not relate to them and/or will not deliver positive change.

Human rights are also increasingly misunderstood, in part because some of the mainstream media coverage focusses on disconnection and misinformation. This is compounded by legal barriers to incorporation, reduced access to justice and redress, rising poverty and inequality, and a lack of accessible information and advice. These barriers make our vision and mission more urgent.

HRCS exists to bridge these gaps and misunderstandings, and to promote the use of human rights as a tool to overcome discrimination and prejudice including communication poverty, improving quality of life and wellbeing, and strengthening democracy.

To deliver on HRCS' vision, mission and values over the next five years, we will:

- continue to prioritise the incorporation of human rights in Scotland's legislative and policy framework, including the long-awaited Scottish Human Rights Bill
- strengthen our network by increasing our membership
- increase capacity-building support for our members including the development of accessible and inclusive resources
- amplify our members' - and individual human rights defenders' - voices and experiences through engagement and advocacy with the United Nations, the Council of Europe, the UK Government and the Scottish Government

HRCS and our members would be pleased to meet to discuss how we can support delivery of these commitments.

Yours sincerely

Charlie McMillan

Charlie McMillan
Director, Human Rights Consortium Scotland

The following organisations are co-signatories to this letter:

Humanist Society Scotland



Disability Equality Scotland



Close the Gap



Worker Support Centre



The Paristamen Charity



Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance



Scottish Community Development Network



Legal Services Agency



National Autistic Taskforce



LGBT Youth Scotland



Just Fair



Third Sector Human Rights & Equalities (THRE)



Independent Advocacy Perth & Kinross



Lanarkshire Deaf Hub



Making Rights Real



Scottish Commission for People with Learning Disabilities (SCLD)



The Young Women's Movement



Welfare Scotland



Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO)



The Donaldson Trust



Equality Network



Scottish Child Law Centre



Outside the Box



No Recourse North East



Glasgow Disability Alliance (GDA)



Environmental Rights Centre for Scotland (ERCS)



JustRight Scotland



Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland (the ALLIANCE)



Inclusion Scotland



Glasgow Council for the Voluntary Sector (GCVS)



Amnesty International UK



ARGH Scotland



Amina – The Muslim Women’s Resource Centre



Deaf Links



Alcohol Focus Scotland



Scotland’s International Development Alliance



Art27 Scotland



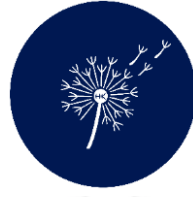
Children’s Parliament



Ayr Housing Aid Centre SCIO



Dandelion Solidarity CIC



Community Transport Association



BEMIS

