

My thanks to Claire and Cath for that introduction.

It's a joy to be here and when I came in there was a real buzz coming up the stairs. Claire and Cath were nervous about how the event was going to go but I can see from the faces here how committed and interested you all are and I'm sure you'll want to hear good stuff from me. It is an honour to be invited along to speak to you. I'd like to add my own welcome to you all.

I'm working with many of you on lots of other things that are not totally health related but rights related. You represent a wide range of the organisations and individuals who are facing and tackling some of the wide range of issues that affect far too many of Scotland's citizens impacting on their ability to live well, to thrive and to enjoy good health and wellbeing.

I will repeat some of these and make no apology for that. We know some of the issues that have the greatest impacts on citizens each day and you know on the front line that these are just a few examples. and we have to make sure good health and well-being is at the heart of what we do.

What do we mean by human right to health?

To me the right to health is a fundamental human right. It means the right of everyone to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.

The right to health is an inclusive right. This means that it is not just the health service that should meet these standards, all of the things that influence our health (the social determinants of health) should be accessible, available, appropriate and high quality if we are to have a healthier Scotland.

You may be thinking what is she doing here, she is not health? One role I have in Government is to mainstream human rights and equalities in all we do. I get into everyone's business, including the right to health, and I am keen to continue that well-being nation type of attitude where we measure our success on the well-being of our people not just our GDP.

The right to good health is a fundamental human right and with my background in social work, I want good outcomes for people and believe we should have the right to the highest attainable physical and mental health. It's not just the Health Service that should meet these standards but all things should be accessible, available, appropriate, of high quality if we want that healthier Scotland.

We continue to see inequalities in Scotland and we see that not everyone is enjoying their best human rights to the highest possible standard of health in Scotland. Not everyone enjoys the same level of health and some difference are unavoidable. Some are broadly in our own control and some are in Government control.

Our diets, the decision whether we smoke or not, how much alcohol we consume and so on. There are also many external factors, that are beyond our control such as childhood experiences, quality of housing, unemployment, employment, education, income, social support and many others aspects that may affect us.

Poverty and inequality is a human rights issue. Our vision is for everyone in Scotland to live with human dignity and enjoy their rights. We continue to tackle child poverty, food insecurity and ensure that the voices of those who experience poverty are heard. That lived experience is becoming natural every day work now and as we set up the social security system, we design out inequality and design out barriers and design in inclusivity to inform and shape what we do from now on.

Unfortunately, despite all the good work we are doing in Scotland, we continue to see the negative impacts on wellbeing of continued austerity as a result of UK Government economic and welfare policies. A report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that child poverty has been rising since 2011/12. 4.1 million children now live in poverty, a rise of 500,000 in the last five years. It is likely that we will be faced with the consequences of this for many years to come.

Work with the United Nations on the rights of the child will deliver the legislation needed to do that by end of this Parliamentary term. A recent consultation just closed and seemed very vibrant and many people took part and I look forward to seeing the report with lots of bold recommendations in there. The Task force have challenged us in Government and many organisations are challenging us to respond and rightly so and we look forward to advancing on that. It is therefore vital that we continue to introduce the right measures in Scotland in order to eradicate child poverty and to reduce health and social inequalities.

To place the human right to health into a wider context, the Scottish Government is committed to ensuring Scotland is a modern, inclusive nation which protects, respects and realises internationally recognised human rights. Importantly, our commitment to meeting Scotland's human rights obligations drives our commitment to equality, dignity and respect in everything we do. Our Programme for Government, launched at the beginning of this month, sets out a wide range of actions and initiatives to improve the lives of the people of Scotland.

I don't think I have enough time to list them all, and I am sure you don't want me to, but I will give you a flavour of what we are doing.

We are investing £1.5 million to support disabled people into work; we are supporting more employers so that they can pay the living wage; we are tackling fuel poverty; we will launch a new £1.5 million Homelessness Prevention Fund to prevent homelessness in low-income families; we will also bring forward the date for the first payments of the Scottish Child Payment: for under 6s, the first payments will be made by Christmas 2020, giving families who need it most an additional £10 per child per week. This payment will lift an estimated 30,000 children out of relative poverty when fully rolled out and increase family incomes for thousands more.

Scotland's National Performance Framework explicitly recognises the obligation to respect, protect and fulfil international human rights – doing so is a crucial part of making Scotland a fairer and more equal society where everyone is valued, protected and respected.

The First Minister's Advisory Group on Human Rights Leadership presented its recommendations at the end of 2018. We have now established a National Taskforce for Human Rights Leadership which will work to ensure Scotland is a world leader in putting human rights into practice. The priority of the Task Force will be a new Act for the Scottish Parliament that incorporates the rights set out in United Nations and other international human rights treaties into domestic law.

It will drive work to give practical effect to the protections provided by other treaties and obligations, including the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, and bringing them into domestic law. The Taskforce will comment its work in Autumn this year and report on its work in 2021.

We have an obligation, both legal and moral, to respect, protect, fulfil and enhance international human rights. It is a crucial part of making Scotland a safer, fairer and more equal society where everyone is valued, protected and respected.

The National Taskforce for Human Rights Leadership will work to ensure that Scotland is a world leader in putting human rights into practice. It will develop a new statutory framework which will help to safeguard the human rights of everyone in Scotland.

It will drive work that includes bringing protections provided by the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women and other treaties into domestic law.

I would like to end by reiterating both my own and the Scottish Government's commitment to human rights, and how that drives our commitment to equality, social justice and sustainable, inclusive growth.

We will continue to be challenged to deliver on this commitment, but we are ready to meet that challenge.

We are progressing a wide range of initiatives that aim to improve the support human rights in Scotland.

The Gypsy/Traveller Ministerial Working Group; the National Action Plan on British Sign Language; the Good Food Nation Bill which will include a right to food; the Ending Homelessness Prevention Fund. These are just a few examples.

One example, the Scottish Government recently launched a GP card called right to health, and I see David Donaldson nodding away. Working with the gypsy traveller community regarding poor health outcomes and the issue about people who were going to GP practices and being told "you can't be seen here". Something as simple as a card that lists your right to health. We realise that the card is not only valuable for the gypsy traveller community but it works for refugees and homeless people also.

Letting people know what their rights are and to give them something to exercise those rights. Very simple, launched at the weekend, please share it and right to health is key to that but taken collectively and by the Government working

collaboratively with the statutory sector, the third sector, with you here today, we can take significant steps to making a country where human rights are embedded in the way we do things.

Health inequalities are the unjust and avoidable differences in people's health across the population and between specific population groups. They do not just blight the lives of those affected, they act as a drag on the Scottish economy and it affects us all. Unequal distribution of income, power, wealth, poor quality paid work, poor quality housing affects physical and mental well-being of our entire nation.

I hope discussion today can help with resolutions we can work together to realise our right to good health in Scotland.

Thank you