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CALL FOR NEW SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT TO STAMP OUT FOOD POVERTY IN LIGHT OF UK GOVERNMENT'S SYSTEMATIC ASSAULT ON RIGHT TO FOOD

Nourish Scotland has this week (11 May) sent evidence to a UN Committee detailing UK and Scottish Government failure to meet obligations under international human rights law. [1]

Following the election of a new Scottish Parliament, **Nourish is calling for Scotland to take the UK lead in stamping out food poverty** by making urgent changes needed to enable everyone in Scotland to exercise their right to affordable, healthy and sustainable food with dignity and choice. Nourish has provided the UN Committee with a comprehensive analysis of why people in Scotland can't yet realise their right to food; including financial inaccessibility, the dietary inadequacy of food, exposure to toxic substances, and lack of access to land to grow.

Nourish welcomes the Scottish government's lead in recent years in beginning to make the changes needed; by mitigating the impact of the Bedroom Tax, through the provision of the Scottish Welfare Fund, and by establishing a Short Life Working Group on Poverty. **But we need to do more** to radically realign Scotland's food system by creating a framework in which everyone has access to good quality, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food as a right, which treats producers and animals fairly, enriches our communities and doesn't cost the Earth.

Three of the main political parties elected to the Parliament, the SNP, Scottish Greens and Scottish Labour, **made promising manifesto commitments** to support Nourish's aims through the introduction of a Food, Farming and Health Bill. This could bring coherence across the food system and oversight through the establishment of an independent food commission.

The evidence highlights the impact of austerity and stagnant wages on the financial accessibility of food. Recent data from just one food bank provider shows that 1,109,309 UK people received charitable food parcels last year, 415,866 of them children. [2] There is no comprehensive monitoring of food insecurity in the UK but new UN Data [3] estimates suggest in the region of 10-

20% are not sure whether they will have enough food to meet their needs and that the UK ranks in the bottom half of European countries.

On the drivers of food insecurity, Elli Kontoravdis, Policy and Campaigns Officer at Nourish, said “Low wages, insecure work and underemployment are persistent issues, with many people simply not earning enough to meet the rising cost of living – the new National Living Wage still does not meet peoples basic living costs, and this contravenes international human rights. It is unacceptable that the UK Government has not properly assessed the cumulative impact of austerity”.

Ms Kontoravdis **continued to explain the impact of this on health** and quality of life, “People are being forced to trade down on the nutritional quality of the food that they eat. In Scotland we have failed to meet every single dietary target since monitoring began. People with lower incomes have poorer diets – the difference in cost between healthy and unhealthy food plays a huge role here and where this affects children it has long-term impacts on adult quality of life”.

On the UK Government’s failure to address the rise of food banks Ms Kontoravdis said “We really respect the work that food bank volunteers are doing to support people in crisis but food banks must not become an entrenched arm of the social security system. It is the responsibility of government to create conditions in which everyone has financial access to food with dignity and choice. Feeding hungry people waste food fails to address the root causes of either problem.’

Pete Ritchie, Executive Director of Nourish Scotland concluded, “Our food system is characterised by inequality and exploitation. It is shameful that in response to the UN’s initial questions on the right to food that the UK Government’s claimed to be ‘committed to an all-out assault on poverty’. We all know that is not the case. The UK Government has overseen a systematic assault on the right to an adequate standard of living, and in Scotland and the UK we must act now before our society entrenches food poverty and charitable food donations as the acceptable norm”. [4]

- ENDS -

Notes to Editor:

The UK is reporting the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights as part of a 5-yearly review cycle of its performance of rights contained in the [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#). The UK ratified the Covenant in 1976, but has not incorporated the rights in to the UK legal system – making them difficult to enforce.

The right to food is contained within the right to an adequate standard of living, Article 11. The right to food includes a number of aspects that must be ‘progressively realised’ – this requires states to take action ‘to the maximum of available resources’, including to progress financial and geographical accessibility, nutritional adequacy, freedom from adverse substances, the availability of food through access to land, processing, distribution, markets, and sustainability in to the future. States should not regress on rights, and actions should not discriminately impact on the enjoyment of rights. The right to food also includes immediately applicable rights which includes the right to be free from hunger.

[Nourish Scotland](#) is an NGO campaigning for a fairer food system. Nourish has submitted evidence to the Committee as part of their broader [Right to Food Campaign](#), which advocates for the International Covenant to be incorporated in to Scots Law – making the rights enforceable, and for the introduction of a Food, Farming and Health Act in Scotland to provide an integrated approach in making the right to food a reality.

[1] Nourish Shadow Report to UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 2016

[2] [Trussell Trust data](#) 2015/16

[3] [UN Food and Agriculture Organisation](#) estimates 2014/15, and estimates based on most recent government figures on [UK relative poverty line](#) 2013/14.

[4] UK Government response to the UN Committee's question on food insecurity in the UK was 'the UKG is committed to an all-out assault on poverty' [full text available here](#).

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Tel 01312 261497; 07854 574982 Elli is available for interview from Wednesday 11th from 2pm onwards, and then on Thursday 12th, Friday 13th and Saturday 14th.