**Prime Minister Rishi Sunak**

rishi.sunak.mp@parliament.uk

House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

CC:

**Mims Davies MP**

Secretary of State for Disabled People, Health and Work

mims.davies.mp@parliament.uk

**Mel Stride MP**

Secretary of State for Work and Pensions

mel.stride.mp@parliament.uk

**James Cleverly MP**

Secretary of State for the Home Department

james.cleverly.mp@parliament.uk

House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

7th May 2024

Dear Prime Minister,

**An ongoing assault on Disabled People’s Rights**

We are writing to you following the recent onslaught of attacks from your Government on Disabled People’s rights and the United Nations report that was published on the 24th of April regarding the UK’s violations of the UNCRDP.

After having nearly eight years to make progress since the UN’s last investigation, which found “grave and systemic” violations, the UN’s latest report has found that “no significant progress has been made” and “there are also signs of regression”.

The UN Committee on the Rights of Disabled People concluded that the UK Government has: “failed to take all appropriate measures to address grave and systematic violations of the human rights of persons with disabilities and has failed to eliminate the root causes of inequality and discrimination.”

Despite this special inquiry focusing on articles 19, 27, and 28 of the convention – the committee also emphasised how article 8 (which obligates the UK Government to combat stereotypes, prejudices, and harmful practices) is being ignored to justify welfare reform.

The committee described our social security system as having "a pervasive framework and rhetoric that devalues disabled people and undermines their human dignity" and that "reforms within social welfare benefits are premised on a notion that disabled people are undeserving and wilfully avoiding employment (“skiving off”) and defrauding the system. This has resulted in hate speech and hostility towards disabled people."

On Friday, 19th April, when announcing harmful welfare reforms which will push thousands more people into insecure and unsafe work, you claimed this was a necessary attack on “sick note culture”. As accessing social security had become a “lifestyle choice”. This is harmful misinformation.

We were also appalled to see the details of your “Modernising support for independent living: the health and disability green paper”, which undermines the very principle of an extra cost benefit for Disabled people.

You cannot scare people into good health, and you cannot force people into inaccessible jobs.

The UN report exposed a “disturbingly consistent theme” of harmful policies and practices leading to an increasing rate of suicide among Disabled benefit claimants and an increase in the institutionalisation of Disabled people - including the use of abusive practice in mental health settings. The committee stated an estimated 600 suicides over three years as a direct result of our social security system and emphasised that there had been no investigations into unexpected deaths in mental health settings. We have long been calling on the Government to hold a benefit-related deaths inquiry and investigate abusive mental healthcare settings, but you continue to hide the details of this dangerous negligence.

The committee also stated that current policy—specifically the Work Capability Assessment—is “not suitable to assist people to be job ready,” that assessors are unqualified to support Disabled people, and that the assessment should be reformed into a holistic, trauma-informed process based on the human rights model of disability. Despite claiming you aim to support us into work, it’s clear that your policies fail to do this.

You also claim that these reforms are a proportionate response to tackling fraud. But, according to last year’s DWP spending figures, fraud only amounted to 0.2%. This 0.2% is also an overrepresentation, as we know from recent reports – including the resignation of a Number 10 Dementia Advisor – that there is a pattern of administrative errors and unfair convictions over Carers Allowance.

This would suggest that the aim of your reforms has never been to support us.

The UN committee is also deeply concerned over the inadequate support for “disabled refugees, asylum seekers and those in refugee-like situations.” Yet, on the 25th of April, the Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Act 2024 became law. This law shamefully infringes on the human rights of refugees.

The difficulties we face in this country are not because people in small boats seek sanctuary in the UK or people use the welfare state. We are in this position because of your Government’s complete disregard for international law and contempt for human rights.

As you pointed out the rise in those found unfit to work in your recent speech, we’d like to highlight why this is the case. In February 2024, just under 6.3 million people were on an NHS waiting list for treatment in England - whose health is deteriorating while they remain without help. There is an estimated 1.9 million on the NHS waiting list for mental health services, and current wait times for paediatric autism and ADHD assessments are up to 5 years. A chronic underfunding of the NHS means that nobody can access the healthcare they need when they need it.

In addition to your Government’s negligence towards funding public services, you’re also placing additional barriers on already marginalised communities – such as your proposals to change the NHS constitution to enable the segregation of trans people. Restricting anyone’s access to healthcare is unacceptable.

Outside of the NHS, inadequate housing leaves many of us forced to stay in hospital as there is nowhere to move into, and a lack of accountability on landlords means that too many of us are living with damp and mould, which leads to poor health. We are also still living in a pandemic, with 1.9 million people in the UK estimated to have been experiencing long COVID-19 in March 2023. Many people are still facing the health and social impacts of how poorly COVID-19 has been handled since 2020.

The cost-of-living crisis also leaves families having to choose between heating and eating – leaving us unable to meet our basic human needs.

This is not specific to Disabled people, as in November 2023, the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights found that the UK was violating its legal obligation to “provide a level of social protection which ensured an adequate standard of living – including Disabled people.”

One of the key recommendations provided by the UN is to "closely consult and actively involve" Disabled people and our organisations in policies that impact our lives – something that your Government has consistently failed to do.

We urge you to work with us to build a radical and transformative disability strategy which takes all appropriate measures to address the grave and systematic violations of Disabled people’s rights and eliminates the root causes of inequality and discrimination. A blueprint for action on this can be found in our [Disabled peoples manifesto](https://www.disabledpeoplesmanifesto.com/manifesto).

Sincerely,

Kamran Mallick

CEO of Disability Rights UK

Organisations who co-sign this letter:

Greater Manchester of Disabled People, Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, Choices and Rights Disability Coalition, Disabled Peoples Action Group - Bradford and District, Liberty, Disability Positive, Wheels for Wellbeing, William Gomes, Director, The William Gomes Podcast, Reclaim the Agenda, Mental Health Independent Support Team, Wiltshire Centre for Independent Living, Care Rights UK, Face Equality International, Rochdale and District Disability Action Group, Manchester Disabled People's Access Group, Lee Starr-Elliott CWU Disability lead SW region and Deaf DPAC founder, Equity Trade Union, Disability Assist, Legal Action for Women, Global Women Against Deportations, Institute of Race Relations, Civil Society Alliance, WECIL, Inclusion London and REAL.