

22nd March 2013

Re: Petition P-04-432

As conscientious citizens of Wales we welcome this opportunity to express our views to the committee.

The Assembly has taken public pride in protecting the rights of children, not least in its innovative role as the first legislature in Britain to appoint a Children's Commissioner. That the Commissioner's work must follow the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), encourages expectation of a positive outcome for the petition. The stance of the UNCRC towards the British military's recruitment of children is very clear.

In its 2008 report to the UK, the UNCRC expressed concern at recruitment practices relating to under-18s (the UN uses the term **child soldiers**) and called for the minimum recruitment age to be raised to 18. In 2009 this recommendation, and others relating to young people in the armed forces, was endorsed by Parliament's Joint Committee on Human Rights. The report also highlighted evidence that the experience of recruits in the 16 – 18 age bracket is adversely affected by their relative lack of maturity, and that their high drop-out rate results in millions of pounds in wasted expenditure.

The outcome of the petition has broader relevancy than the question of MOD recruitment in schools, and may serve as something of a test-case for the depth of autonomy of the Welsh legislature, following the March 2011 referendum for increased powers.

We feel that this petition faces Welsh politicians with the dilemma over whether to truly represent the interests and values of the people of Wales, or to simply serve other interests. Has the Assembly become sufficiently democratic that it legislates on behalf of the welfare of the children under its care, in opposition to the requirements of the UK military-industrial complex? The Labour Party has transformed considerably in recent decades in pursuit of votes in English constituencies; this petition offers an opportunity to prove publicly that it has not cut loose completely from its founding values.

The question of Ministry of Defence recruiters' pursuit of minors in the school environment offers a very clear case for legislative change on moral grounds alone. However, should the Petitions Committee find cause to close the petition, our campaign will continue apace, armed with documented evidence of Welsh politicians' reluctance to take action where they should. We trust that our representatives would much prefer to spare themselves such public embarrassment.

Although members of Cardiff & District United Nations Association, we write in our personal capacity and as initiators of the petition and campaign.

Yours sincerely

Leon Russell and Sara Hawys

United Nations Association, Cardiff

