



Young People's Rights Review

Rory Smith MSYP - Freedom of Speech

Good afternoon! I am Rory Smith MSYP for scripture union Scotland and I am delighted to be in front of you representing young Christians from all across Scotland.

This event is all about celebrating the recognition of the inherent dignity and equality of ALL members of the human family. And that this is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world. That inherent dignity includes the right to be able to think, believe and hold religious faith. I want to suggest that if we are to have true celebration of diversity of thought, Christians ought to be able to share their beliefs, opinions and values freely.

When consulting with the young people I represent the majority of them feel strongly that their right to put their thoughts and beliefs into action is being hampered. As Christians our faith is an inalienable part of who we are. As a consequence, we feel we can't be who we are when we are not allowed to express this.

Something that my peers fed back to me was frequently feeling like this in classes at school. For example the trans and same sex marriage ideology is taught in such a way that does not facilitate a diversity of views. The risk here is that we are creating a society where there is a hierarchy of rights.

The right that the LGBT+ community has to acceptance is undoubted however it now often out-ranks the rights of all who hold religious values. I do not say this to aim to decrease the value of some rights, rather to encourage the view that all human rights should exist on a level playing field.

Because Christian values are viewed as being in opposition to LGBT+ viewpoints, they have been devalued. My constituents have come to me with real life examples of violations of article 10 (ECHR). For example there has been active discrimination on university campuses where the distribution of Christian material - in this case, a flyer for a carol service - has led to disciplinary action. As expressing and sharing our values is a core part of our identity, being prevented from doing this actively infringes upon our human rights.

There is currently no reference to maintaining religious freedom in the draft Young People's Rights National Action Plan. A simple starting point would be for the Government to commit to bringing in a new specific strategy to protect the religious freedoms listed in the Barnabas fund petition. Additionally, the Scottish Government should seek to promote dialogue, healthy conversations and real respect of all values specifically in settings of formal education. These institutions, which play such a big part in shaping the lives of young people, should be at the forefront of protecting and promoting their human rights.