Many thanks for the opportunity to comment on the Scottish Government’s international engagement strategy as part of your Committee’s “Connecting Scotland” inquiry. The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) is the National Equality Body (NEB)¹ for Scotland, England and Wales, working across the nine protected grounds set out in the Equality Act 2010: age, disability, gender, race, religion and belief, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, sexual orientation and gender reassignment. We are an “A-status” National Human Rights Institution (NHRI)², and share our human rights mandate in Scotland with our colleagues in the Scottish Human Rights Commission (SHRC).

The Commission’s comments relate to paragraph 50 of the Scottish Government’s engagement strategy:

“As a good global citizen, Scotland has a strong and enduring commitment to securing democracy, the rule of law and fundamental human rights across the world. We would expect all states to comply with international and human rights law, and condemn human rights abuses wherever they occur. Scotland will use its international engagement as an opportunity to help increase respect for, and understanding of, human rights worldwide. We will have ongoing dialogue with states at Ministerial and official level, raising human rights where appropriate in a diplomatic and culturally sensitive fashion. We will share our experiences, values and expertise in areas such as justice, education, and climate change with a view to seeing the human rights of people across the world fully realised.”

The Committee of course supports these principles, and would suggest that the Committee may find it useful to examine in more detail how Scotland promotes and respects equality and human rights internationally, and reflects international obligations in domestic law and policy. For example, the Scottish Government, in its submission to the Smith Commission on further devolution³, proposes that Scotland be able to develop more direct bilateral relationships with the international human rights system, for example in being able to directly ratify optional protocols to international human rights instruments, or to submit reports to UN human right reporting bodies.

¹ www.equineteurope.org/-Equality-bodies-
³ www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0046/00460563.pdf , p32
The Committee may want to consider the benefits and feasibility of these proposals, and to consider other means by which Scotland could enhance and develop its engagement with international equality and human rights structures and institutions. I hope this information is of use to the Committee. If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

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