

OVER 160 GROUPS TELL THERESA MAY: DON'T ABANDON OUR HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

Submitted by: The British Institute of Human Rights

Thursday, 8 December 2016

Organisations come together to say now is time to think again, not to risk further division and legal confusion

For Immediate Release, 8 December 2016

A letter asking the Prime Minister to abandon plans to scrap the Human Rights Act has been signed by 164 organisations, including those working with new mothers, children, patients, carers, people with learning disabilities and mental ill-health, women experiencing violence, migrants and older people, and groups campaigning for LGBT rights, fair trials, access to justice, decent housing and against racial discrimination.

The British Institute for Human Rights (BIHR) is publishing the letter on Saturday (10 December), Human Rights Day, to show the breadth of support for the Human Rights Act across the UK. Amnesty International UK, Liberty and Human Rights Watch as well as trade unions and law firms have signed the letter.

Stephen Bowen, Director of BIHR, said: "I hope the Prime Minister will listen to so many respected organisations, all with first-hand knowledge of how the Human Rights Act helps so many people in their everyday lives and why it isn't something to scrap but something to cherish. These are uncertain times and Theresa May should not be adding to the legal confusion, risking further division, or signalling that the UK wants to walk away from international standards. Instead, she can give us all something to cheer by saving the Human Rights Act."

The letter reads:

Dear Prime Minister,

Today, on Human Rights Day, we will celebrate the difference the Human Rights Act makes to all our lives.

The Human Rights Act is something to cherish. It helps those delivering frontline services to make difficult ethical decisions and enables families to hold those in powerful positions to account. It is key to defending our free press and to protecting our democracy. It is the Bill of Rights we already have.

This year, huge uncertainty and upheaval began that will continue for years to come. It is not the time to add to the legal confusion, to risk further division or signal that the UK wants to walk away from international standards. Now is the time to champion, at home and abroad, the protection of hard-won human rights. For everyone.

The day you became Prime Minister you said your mission was to make Britain a country that works for

everyone, including the disadvantaged. You said that when your government passes new laws you would listen to ordinary people and you would do everything you could to give them more control over their lives.

The Human Rights Act makes a much-valued difference to all our lives and for many people that difference is dramatic. Please, Prime Minister, drop the Government's commitment to "scrap" the Human Rights Act.

ENDS

Further Information

For further information, including a full list of signatories, please call Sanchita Hosali on 07811 457343 or email shosahi@bihr.org.uk

Notes for Editors:

1. For over 40 years the British Institute of Human Rights, a UK-wide independent human rights charity, has worked to bring rights to life here at home. We help people to know what human rights are and are not, to put their human rights into practice to achieve positive change in everyday life without resorting to the courts and to make sure that those in power respect our human rights laws and systems. At the heart of everything we do is a commitment to making sure the international promise of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, developed after the horrors of World War II, is made real here at home. Our innovative work seeks to achieve a society where human rights are respected as the cornerstone of our democracy and enable each of us to live well in communities that value the equal dignity of each person. For more information visit www.bihhr.org.uk and follow us on Twitter @BIHRhumanrights

2. Human Rights Day, on 10 December, marks the day in 1948 when the United Nations proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The UK provided one of the eight drafters who, alongside US former First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, produced the 30 Articles of the UDHR, recognising the "equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family". The European Convention on Human Rights enforces many of the rights set out in the UDHR and the Human Rights Act (HRA) 1998 gives UK courts the power to rule on human rights issues. The Conservative Party included a promise in its 2015 manifesto to scrap the HRA and replace it with a 'British Bill of Rights'.