**Press Release**

18.05.2016

**THREAT TO HUMAN RIGHTS ACT STILL ON THE AGENDA DESPITE CENTRALITY TO THE BELFAST/GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT**

The Human Rights Consortium has said that it is extremely concerned that proposals for a British Bill of Rights announced in today’s Queen’s Speech are still a serious consideration for the UK Government despite the clear indications that such a proposal would mean removing existing protections in the Human Rights Act (HRA) from legislation. The Queen’s Speech today contained reference to the UK government plans to take forward ‘Proposals on a British Bill of Rights’.

Director of the Human Rights Consortium Kevin Hanratty said, “The Consortium believes that there is a fundamental lack of understanding within the Conservative Government that the Human Rights Act forms a central part of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement (B/GFA). The agreement was an International Peace Treaty with another state signatory and removal of the HRA or any alteration of the enjoyment of the Convention rights (*European Convention of Human Rights*) it helps provides domestic access to would represent a serious breach of the terms of this agreement. It would also remove one of the core legislative and public authority scrutiny mechanisms that was so central to building and maintaining community confidence in the peace process and the new political institutions at Stormont.”

“Work with our members across Northern Ireland has shown that the Human Rights Act has been an important tool for ensuring the protection of many individual rights across our society and its removal would represent a serious deterioration in those standards. The Act has been utilized for everything from allowing people to live independently in their homes with proper disability access to allowing unmarried widows to have equal access to child benefits. Getting rid of these protections is regressive and instead the UK Government should be seeking to use the HRA as bottom floor on which to build upon through progressive mechanisms such as a local Northern Ireland Bill of Rights rather than a version that seeks to diminish and remove rights as seems to be the case with proposals to date.”

ENDS