

c/o Human Rights Consortium
Community House
6A Albert Street
Belfast
BT12 4HQ



6 April 2023

Dear Prime Minister (Rishi Sunak MP), Leader of the Opposition (Sir Keir Starmer MP) and Taoiseach (Leo Varadkar TD),

We write to you as civil society organisations from across all communities, sectors and areas of Northern Ireland who believe that strong and inclusive human rights protections must be a core part of improving this society.

On the 25th anniversary of the Belfast / Good Friday Agreement, we call on you to help deliver the outstanding human rights commitments that our peace deal originally envisioned a quarter of a century ago.

The main undelivered commitment of that Agreement is a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. There continues to be overwhelming public and widespread political support for a new Bill of Rights, with 80%+ support in a public survey commissioned by the Assembly.

Yet the UK Government continues to block progress by insisting on complete party political consensus before a Bill of Rights can proceed. If such a veto had been allowed to apply to the Agreement itself, or for instance to the reform of policing, they would never have happened.

We now need to remove the veto on the Bill of Rights and move to delivery mode.

We are also deeply concerned at ongoing attempts to remove or undermine existing human rights standards that are fundamentally linked to the Agreement. Recent government proposals to scrap the Human Rights Act would have represented a substantial weakening of human rights across the United Kingdom by diminishing the level of protection we enjoy under the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), a cornerstone of the peace agreement.

The signatories to the Belfast / Good Friday Agreement committed themselves to 'the achievement of reconciliation, tolerance, and mutual trust, and to the protection and vindication of the human rights of all.' The lack of progress on the Bill of Rights and the threat to diminish existing rights is a betrayal of those values and a failure to fulfil the promises made 25 years ago.

The UK Government must take forward its responsibility to deliver a Northern Ireland Bill of Rights, protect the Human Rights Act and guarantee full access to the European Convention on Human Rights.

We call on you and all of those in positions of power and leadership to commit to this goal and to a specific and timetabled plan to make it a reality.

It is time to Make Our Future Fair.

Sincerely,

c/o Human Rights Consortium
Community House
6A Albert Street
Belfast
BT12 4HQ

Advice NI
Alliance for Choice Belfast
Amnesty International UK
Angel Eyes NI
Belfast Feminist Network
CAJ
Cara-Friend
Centre for Cross Border Studies
Children's Law Centre
Community Dialogue
Community Organisations of South Tyrone &
Areas Ltd
Community Transport Association
Development Trusts NI
Disability Action
Ecojustice Ireland
End Deportations Belfast
Forward South Partnership
Foyle Women's Information Network
Friends of the Earth
Here NI
Horn of Africa People's Aid Northern Ireland
(HAPANI)
Human Rights Consortium
Humanists UK
Huntington's Disease Association Northern
Ireland
Include Youth
Law Centre NI
Migrant Centre NI
Migrant Justice Project
MindWise
NI Youth Forum
NIACRO
NICRE
North West Community Network
North West Migrant's Forum (NWMF)
Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action
(NICVA)
Northern Ireland Mixed Marriage Association
Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance
(NIPSA)
Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network
Northwest Forum of People with Disabilities
NUS-USI (National Students' Union NI)

Participation and the Practice of Rights
Prospect Community
Reclaim the Agenda
Rights & Security International
RNIB NI
Roma Support Hub
Rural Community Network
Step
Strathfoyle Women's Activity Group
The Community Foundation for Northern
Ireland
The Public Interest Litigation Support (PILS)
Project
The Rainbow Project
Training for Women Network (TWN)
UNISON
Unite the Union
United Against Racism Belfast
Volunteer Now
Women's Platform
Women's Regional Consortium
Women's Resource and Development Agency
Women's Support Network

Cc: Northern Ireland Party leaders and MPs

