

Media Release

09.12.2020

EMBARGOED 00.01am 10.12.2020

On global Human Rights Day over 110 groups from across the UK issue an open letter to the Prime Minister and political leaders, urging them to respond proportionately to Covid-19, protect people's rights and the rule of law, and to stand by the Human Rights Act

In the week that the UK Government launches a [review of the Human Rights Act](#); today, over 110 organisations have issued an open letter to the Prime Minister and political leaders across the UK urging them to stand with them for the **“shared values of equal dignity, respect, fairness and decency; to protect people's rights and the rule of law, to stand for the Human Rights Act.”**

Issued on the 10 December, global Human Rights Day, the open letter highlights the extraordinary events of 2020, and in particular the pandemic, noting that **“human rights must not be an afterthought in times of crisis; human rights were born of disaster and must guide the Covid-19 response and recovery”**.

The open call to stand firm on the human rights of all people across the UK comes from grassroots groups, local charities, international organisations, professional bodies and statutory Commissioners, health and care providers, lawyers, and support groups. From community groups in York to household names like Amnesty International and Marie Curie, from social work associations to dementia charities like Alzheimer's Scotland, to self-led disability groups like All Wales People First to the Law Society of Northern Ireland; the message is clear; human rights matter for us all.

Together the groups note **“Too many people have suffered disproportionately, including BAME communities, older people, disabled people, children, women, carers and more.”** It notes that the UK's Human Rights Act contains “rights which belong to us all ... to life, liberty, freedom from harm, non-discrimination, family, wellbeing, and choice.” **These “powerful” tools have been under-used” in the response to the pandemic; the response must “protect the equal human dignity of us all, and human rights legislation offers a way to navigate this maze, to balance risk with rights.”**

The open letter is coordinated by the British Institute of Human Rights. Speaking on the release of the open letter, BIHR Director, Sanchita Hosali said:

“This year we've all witnessed just how important our rights are, many of us have felt sharply what human rights means, our wellbeing has been tested, we've faced restrictions on our liberty, and measures which have discriminated. Even, or especially in the grips of this pandemic, we can do better than blanket “do not resuscitate” orders placed on the medical files of disabled people and children; better than the disproportionate use of police powers against BAME communities; better than leaving older people abandoned in care homes, many with dementia unable to remember their loved ones after almost a year apart.”

“Our Human Rights Act, rather than being reviewed, needs to be used for the purpose it was intended; to help us build a culture of respect where every institution and decision-maker thinks about all of our rights how to balance these in proportionate ways that keep us safe and well whilst respecting our dignity. That is the kind of decent society the Human Rights Act can help us achieve. Today, over 110 organisations spanning the length and breadth of the UK recognise this; we see the difference our Human Rights Act can make for people in everyday ways that make all of our lives better. In these most difficult of times, our Human

Rights Act can help navigate the maze of uncertainty, securing the accountable and people-focused exercise of power we all need.”

On a day in which the global community marks the importance of human rights, over 110 groups across the UK will **“stand together, proud of our human rights standards in the UK, but worried that political rhetoric is again turning towards questioning our laws, with increasing concerns that people’s ability to seek accountability will be reduced.”** They call on the Prime Minister and political leaders to **“stand with us for the dignity of all people, for respect, fairness and decency; for a proportionate response to these extraordinary times that focuses on protecting people’s rights and the rule of law. To stand with us for our Human Rights Act.”**

Notes

- The open letter, coordinated by the British Institute of Human Rights, will be available publicly from the 0.01am 10 December 2020: www.bihhr.org.uk/HRDay2020 To discuss prior access to the letter please contact Sanchita Hosali, Director, BIHR on shosali@bihhr.org.uk (out of hours: 07811 457343) or Carlyn Miller, Policy and Programmes Manager on cmiller@bihhr.org.uk
- The 10 December marks global Human Rights Day. On this day in 1948, the United Nations adopted the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** (UDHR) following WW2. In the preamble to the European Convention on Human Rights 1950, the Council of Europe reaffirms the UDHR aim of securing universal and effective observance of human rights. The UK’s Human Rights Act 1998 creates legal duties that bring these Convention rights into UK law and makes the enforceable here at home.
- The British Institute of Human Rights is a registered charity working across the UK to achieve social change through human rights by working directly with people, communities and public bodies to change practice and amplify this evidence of human rights in action to influence policy. On 10 December BIHR will be hosting 2 events:
 - **Open access human rights session to learn more about the Human Rights Act beyond the courtrooms** and how it is being used to support people in their everyday lives. This session will provide an important counter to the prevalent focus on the HRA as being about legal cases only. Over 300 people have signed up; [this event is open to all and can be booked here](#). This is taking place 10-11.30am.
 - **Panel session chaired by Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson reflecting on 70 years of the European Convention, 22 years of the Human Rights Act, and the unprecedented events of 2020.** The session panel will include Prof. Alan Miller (Scottish National Taskforce on Human Rights Leadership); Alexis Quinn (best-selling author and campaigner); Brian Gormally (Director of Committee on the Administration of Justice), Imran Khan QC (Solicitor, lawyer for the Stephen Lawrence family); Joe Powell (CEO of All Wales People First), Prof Merris Amos (School of Law, QMUL) Saba Salman (journalist, commissioning editor and author of Made Possible); Carlyn Miller (BIHR). **The session will be closed by Sir Nicolas Bratza, former president of the European Court of Human Rights.** This is an invitation event between 4.30-6pm; to discuss attendance please contact Phil Moore pmoore@bihhr.org.uk
- The Human Rights Day open letter has been signed by 111 organisations:

1. British Institute of Human Rights	10. Article 39	16. British Association of Social Workers (BASW)
2. Access Social Care	11. Asylum Link Merseyside	17. Campaign for Freedom of Information
3. Advocacy Focus	12. AVA (Against Violence and Abuse)	18. Carers UK
4. AIRE Centre	13. Birthrights	19. Centre for Women’s Justice
5. All Wales People First	14. brap	20. Certitude London
6. Alzheimer Scotland	15. Bristol Mind	
7. Alzheimer’s Societ		
8. Amnesty UK		
9. Article 12 in Scotland		

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| 21. | Changing Our Lives | 61. | Legal Aid Practitioners Group (LAPG) | 104. | Voiceability |
| 22. | Child Rights Alliance for England | 62. | Leigh Day | 105. | Voluntary Organisations Disability Group |
| 23. | Children in Scotland | 63. | Liberty | 106. | Wish |
| 24. | Sally Holland, Children's Commissioner for Wales | 64. | Marie Curie | 107. | Women's Aid |
| 25. | Children's Law Centre | 65. | Mary Ward Legal Centre | 108. | Women's Budget Group |
| 26. | Choice Support | 66. | Mental Health UK | 109. | York Human Rights City Network |
| 27. | Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights | 67. | Migrants Organise Ltd | 110. | Youth Access |
| 28. | Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ) | 68. | Mind | 111. | ForcesWatch |
| 29. | Compassion in Dying | 69. | n-compass | 112. | ROTA – Race on the Agenda |
| 30. | Detention Action | 70. | National Alliance of Women's Organisations | 113. | tide – together in dementia everyday |
| 31. | Disability Wales | 71. | National Care Forum | 114. | Turning Point |
| 32. | Discrimination Law Association | 72. | National Development Team for Inclusion (NDTi) | | |
| 33. | EachOther | 73. | National Survivor User Network (NSUN) | | |
| 34. | End Violence Against Women | 74. | nia | | |
| 35. | English Pen | 75. | Heléna Herklots CBE, Older People's Commissioner for Wales | | |
| 36. | Every Child Protected Against Trafficking | 76. | POhWER | | |
| 37. | Friends, Families and Travellers | 77. | Prison Reform Trust | | |
| 38. | Garden Court Chambers | 78. | Public Law Project | | |
| 39. | Grandparents Plus | 79. | Quakers in Britain | | |
| 40. | Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland (the ALLIANCE) | 80. | RAMFEL (Refugee & Migrant Forum of Essex and London) | | |
| 41. | HEAR Equality and Human Rights Network | 81. | REDRESS | | |
| 42. | Helen Bamber | 82. | Refugee Action York | | |
| 43. | HIV Scotland | 83. | Refugee Council | | |
| 44. | Hourglass | 84. | Relatives & Residents Association | | |
| 45. | Human Rights and Equality Group of the Law Society of Northern Ireland. | 85. | René Cassin | | |
| 46. | Human Rights Consortium Scotland | 86. | Restorative Justice for All International Institute | | |
| 47. | Human Rights Watch | 87. | Rethink Mental Illness | | |
| 48. | Humanist Society Scotland | 88. | Scottish Care | | |
| 49. | Humanists UK | 89. | Scottish Commission for People with Learning Disabilities (SCLD) | | |
| 50. | Inclusion London | 90. | Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance | | |
| 51. | INQUEST | 91. | Scottish Pen | | |
| 52. | Judith Trust | 92. | Shared Lives Plus | | |
| 53. | Juno Women's Aid | 93. | SMK Law Solicitors | | |
| 54. | Just Fair | 94. | Southall Black Sisters | | |
| 55. | Just for Kids Law | 95. | Stonewall | | |
| 56. | JUSTICE | 96. | Suffolk Law Centre | | |
| 57. | Latin American Women's Rights Service (LAWRS) | 97. | Tai Pawb | | |
| 58. | Law Centres Network | 98. | The British Geriatric Society | | |
| 59. | Learning Disability England | 99. | The Challenging Behaviour Foundation | | |
| 60. | Legal Action Group | 100. | The Law Society of Scotland | | |
| | | 101. | Tower Hamlets Law Centre | | |
| | | 102. | UNISON | | |
| | | 103. | Unlock Democracy | | |