

A BRIEF NOTE TO OUR POLITICAL LEADERS ON HUMAN RIGHTS DAY.



Dear Party Leaders

As leaders of civil society organisations – large and small – we write to remind you that today is international human rights day, a day to celebrate the legal protection of universal human rights. Globally, human rights activism has never been more topical or more important; we have witnessed individuals across the world taking to the streets to defend their rights. Yet as we pay tribute to them, we are saddened and disappointed that, here at home, our own Human Rights Act is all too often vilified by powerful voices in some media and political circles.

For our organisations, and for the people we represent, the Human Rights Act is something to be treasured, to be championed and, if the need arises, to be defended. The vital constitutional checks and balances provided by the Human Rights Act; its defence of free speech, the right to protest and our liberty; and the positive impact it has had on enabling the delivery of better and fairer public services are something to be celebrated. For countless people up and down this country the Human Rights Act protects them from violence, abuse and neglect, and ensures fair treatment. In short the Human Rights Act makes sure we are all treated with basic dignity and respect.

Today, we call on all political leaders and representatives to reflect on the true meaning of universal human rights, hard-won and set down in law following the horrors of the Second World War. Now is the time to recognise that this is the true ancestry of our Human Rights Act, which protects each and every one of us. We call on all political leaders and representatives to commit to promoting a true and genuine understanding of human rights and to defend the Human Rights Act. Such a commitment, if properly delivered, would secure our human rights heritage and protect us all. If we in the UK are not willing to stand firm on our Human Rights Act, we undermine the work of so many courageous people across the world who, often at great risk, are trying to make the legal protection of universal human rights a reality in their lives.

Yours sincerely,

British Institute of Human Rights
Stephen Bowen, Director

Action on Hearing Loss
Jackie Ballard, Chief Executive

Age UK Michelle Mitchell, Charity Director

Amnesty International UK
Kate Allen, Director

AVA (Against Violence and Abuse)
Davina James-Hanman, Director

British Humanist Association
Andrew Copson, Chief Executive

Citizens Advice
Ali Harris, Head of Equality Strategy

Discrimination Law Association
Ulele Burnham, Chair

Down's Syndrome Association
Carol Boys, Chief Executive

Employability Forum Beryl Randall, Director

End Violence Against Women
Holly Dustin, Director

Equality and Diversity Forum
Amanda Ariss, Chief Executive

Equality South West Katie Pratt, Chief Executive

Equality Now Jacqui Hunt, London Director

Equanomics-UK Karen Chouhan, Chairperson

Freedom from Torture Keith Best, Chief Executive

Friends, Families and Travellers
Chris Whitwell, Director

Galop Deborah Gold, Chief Executive

Gender Identity Research and Education Society (GIREs) Terry Reed OBE, Trustee

Human Rights Watch David Mephram, UK Director

JUSTICE Roger Smith OBE, Director

Law Centres Federation Julie Bishop, Director

Lesbian and Gay Foundation
Paul Martin OBE, Chief Executive

Liberty Shami Chakrabarti, Director

Mencap Mark Goldring, Chief Executive

Mind Paul Farmer, Chief Executive

NAT (National AIDS Trust)
Deborah Jack, Chief Executive

National Council for Voluntary Organisations
Sir Stuart Etherington, Chief Executive

Press for Change
Prof Dr Stephen Whittle OBE, Vice-President

Prison Reform Trust Juliet Lyon, Director

Race on the Agenda (ROTA)
Dr Elizabeth Henry, Chief Executive

Radar Liz Sayce OBE, Chief Executive

Refugee Council Donna Covey, Chief Executive

René Cassin Simone Abel, Director

Royal College of Nursing
Dr Peter Carter, Chief Executive & General Secretary

Rights of Women Emma Scott, Director

Runnymede Trust Rob Berkeley, Director

Songololo Feet Chris Pounds, Treasurer

UNICEF UK Anita Tiessen, Deputy Executive Director, Communications and Programme

Unlock Democracy Peter Facey, Director

Women's Resource Centre
Vivienne Hayes, Chief Executive

Voice4Change England Vandna Gohil, Director

Yorkshire MESMAC Tom Doyle, Director