

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

125 Scottish organisations unite against the Rights Removal Bill and ask UK Government not to scrap the Human Rights Act

Today, 125 representatives from across Scotland's third-sector have united in their condemnation of the UK Government's Rights Removal Bill.

These organisations have asked the UK Government to reconsider this Bill and instead, consider what can be done to better protect human rights for all in Scotland, and across the UK, in a statement signed by over 100 leading and grassroots women's, children's, refugee and trafficking, housing and homelessness and human rights organisations, and to send a clear message that the Human Rights Act must be protected.

Coordinated by Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland, Amnesty International, JustRight Scotland, Together (Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights), Making Rights Real, Human Rights Consortium Scotland, Church of Scotland and Scottish Commission for People with Learning Disabilities, the statement urges decision makers to stand together to defend our common values of equality and justice, and to oppose this Rights Removal Bill.

They say that – if this Bill becomes law, it will strip rights from people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. And it will significantly dilute legal protections for everyone's rights, whoever we are and whatever our background.

This Bill is not considering the legislative impact on the devolved nations in terms of legal traditions and different court systems and its the impact on people's rights in the context of devolution.

Organisations say the statement is necessary to send a clear message to the UK Government that this Bill should be reconsidered, and to the Scottish Parliament who they say must act to mitigate the inevitable harms of the Bill:

“We are alarmed that the UK Government has introduced a Bill to Parliament which, if enacted, will repeal the Human Rights Act and will significantly diminish protection for human rights in law. We must act now.”

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For more information or for further comment or interview, please contact:

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Quotes for editors:

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Naomi McAuliffe - Scotland Programme Director, Amnesty International UK:

“We are deeply concerned by the Rights Removal Bill and urge the UK Government to stop and reconsider its proposal to repeal the Human Rights Act which has been so integral to the realisation of rights for people across the UK.

“The Scottish Parliament’s role as a rights guarantor has never been more important and we also call on MSPs to oppose this attempt to undermine our human rights and scrutinise the consequences for devolution – which we don’t believe have been properly considered.”

Mhairi Snowden – Director, Human Rights Consortium Scotland:

“There is overwhelming opposition from across Scottish civil society to this Rights Removal Bill. It is a Bill that will set human rights back, and will make it much more difficult for individuals to access justice and accountability. There is simply no reason for this Bill to go ahead, and many many reasons for it to be shelved - we urge the UK Government to think again.”

Jen Ang – Director of Development and Policy, JustRight Scotland:

“We are worried these proposals could restrict our rights and reduce access to justice – making it even harder for people in Scotland who face discrimination and inequality to seek protection from harm and redress for injustice.

“We urge the UK Government to reconsider this Bill.

These proposals will have devolution impacts in Scotland and across UK. We will continue to work together across sectors to ensure those impacts are fully understood by the Scottish and Westminster Parliaments before this legislation is passed.”

Charlie McMillan - Chief Executive, Scottish Commission for People with Learning Disabilities:

“The UK Human Rights Act offers vital protections for people with learning disabilities. At The Scottish Commission for People with Learning Disabilities, we are deeply concerned that the proposed reform of the UK Human Rights Act will remove these protections while also hindering future rights realisation for people with learning disabilities.”

Juliet Harris – Director, Together:

“The Human Rights Act is a powerful and essential mechanism for upholding children’s human rights and should not be repealed. The Rights Removal Bill is deeply regressive and would make it harder for children to enforce their rights and further undermine Scotland's attempts to strengthen the protection of children's rights in law.”

Clare MacGillivray – Director, Making Rights Real:

“The UK Government is unnecessarily dismantling structures that support people and communities to access justice for human rights abuses. Removing the Human Rights Act will weaken accountability for human rights issues and make it even more difficult for people to name and claim their rights.”

Bruce Adamson - Children and Young People’s Commissioner Scotland:

“Children’s rights protections are in grave danger of being eroded by the UK Government’s proposals to reform the Human Rights Act. We, and other human

rights defenders, strongly oppose these proposals. By incorporating the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) into domestic law, the Human Rights Act has been critical to advancing children's rights in Scotland. The Act has empowered children whose rights have been violated to obtain a remedy in national courts, rather than having to go to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg.

"Last year, the Scottish Parliament unanimously voted to protect children's rights by incorporating the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child into Scots law but continued delays mean children are still waiting for that to happen. Now proposals from the UK Government to reform the Human Rights Act risk stripping away the protections that children do have in law. The Scottish Parliament in its role as a human rights guarantor should do all it can to ensure that children's rights in Scotland are protected, respected and fulfilled. Having rights enshrined in law is fundamental to that."

Rev Karen Hendry - Acting Convener of the Faith Impact Forum, Church of Scotland:
"The changes will have complex constitutional effects and will diminish human rights protections in the UK. They lack the consent of the devolved administrations and for those lacking support or the financial resources to do so, they risk being denied access to justice."

Notes for editors:

About the Human Rights Act: More information about the Human Rights Act is available on [JustRight Scotland](#) website.

On Friday 1st July, the UK Parliament will debate the Bill.

Public support for Human Rights Act

In a recent poll commissioned by Amnesty a huge three quarters of people (73%) said they thought it was important to have the Human Rights Act as a safety net to be able to hold the Government to account when things go wrong such as Hillsborough or the handling of the pandemic. The war in Ukraine had clearly influenced people's support for human rights more generally with almost four out of five (79%) of those surveyed saying that Russia's invasion of Ukraine had made it more important that countries like the UK uphold human rights, while almost two thirds (65%) believed that reducing human rights protections in the UK would have a negative impact on the UK's ability to stand up for human rights on the global stage.

International and cross-party UK concerns over proposals

The proposals have raised alarm at the UN. In her outgoing speech as UN High Commissioner for human rights, Michelle Bachelet, singled out the UK for criticism, saying: "I am worried about plans in the United Kingdom to replace one of the most important pieces of its human rights legislation – the Human Rights Act – with more limited legislation. I have concerns that repeal of key elements of the Human Rights Act would risk undermining access to justice and the right to effective remedies, introduce legal uncertainty, and increase costs." These concerns about how proposals are set to substantially weaken rights were echoed by the UK parliament's

rights oversight body, the Joint Committee on Human Rights. Setting out their concerns in a report entitled 'Human Rights Act Reform', the JCHR, which is made up of representatives from the House of Commons and House of Lords, said: "We do not think a case has been made for replacing the Human Rights Act with the British Bill of Rights in the form proposed by the Government." The government's own appointed independent panel, led by Sir Peter Gross, considered and discounted many of the provisions in the Bill. The independent panel found that the Human Rights worked well in general.