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By email

21<sup>st</sup> December 2021

Dear all,

I am writing to draw your attention to a letter I have sent to the Scottish Parliament's Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee concerning the UK Government's consultation on proposals to "replace the Human Rights Act 1998 with a Bill of Rights". A copy of the letter is attached for your information.

That letter reflects the Scottish Government's submission to the UK Government's Independent Human Rights Act Review in March of this year. I very much understand and share your disappointment and concern that the UK Government has chosen to ignore the wealth of expert evidence submitted to the Review and the conclusions reached by the Review panel. The Scottish Government will of course submit a detailed formal response to the UK Government by the consultation deadline, which is 8 March 2022, and I would encourage all civil society organisations with an interest in human rights also to do so. I know that this will already be part of your forward planning.

I can of course assure you that the Scottish Government remains fully committed to respecting, protecting and fulfilling human rights and to defending the Human Rights Act. We are very clear that there must be no changes to the Act which would have the effect of undermining or weakening human rights safeguards in Scotland (or indeed elsewhere in the UK).

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My colleague, the Deputy First Minister, has also now written to the Lord Chancellor to underline the Scottish Government's unequivocal support for the Human Rights Act in its current form. His letter further emphasises that the devolved competence of the Scottish Parliament must be fully respected. Human rights, as you know, are not a reserved matter.

A copy of the Deputy First Minister's letter to the Lord Chancellor is attached for your information.

You will note that the Deputy First Minister's letter draws attention, in particular, to the weight of expert evidence submitted to the UK Government's own Review panel. That evidence, to which your organisations contributed, overwhelmingly demonstrated that the Human Rights Act has been both successful and effective. It made very clear that there is no coherent or reasoned case for "reform".

I know that you will agree with me that it remains essential that progressive interests continue to work in close collaboration to ensure that human rights, democracy and the rule of law are robustly defended not only in Scotland, but across the UK. In that connection, I did very much welcome the statement which your organisations jointly published on Tuesday in response to the UK Government announcement. The Deputy First Minister's letter quotes directly from that response, and the Scottish Government is grateful to you for ensuring that the views of civil society interests in Scotland were set out in this way as a matter of public record.

I want to thank you all for your continuing work in promoting and defending human rights and would invite you to remain in close contact with my officials, who will keep you apprised of future developments.

Yours sincerely,



**SHONA ROBISON**

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