



Submission from the  
**Human Rights Consortium**

to the  
**United Nations Human Rights Committee**

in response to the Sixth Periodic Report submitted by the government of  
the **United Kingdom**

**June 2008**

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## The Human Rights Consortium

The Human Rights Consortium is an independent, non-governmental coalition of 123 civic society organisations from Northern Ireland. The Consortium was established in 2000 and campaigns for the development of a strong and inclusive Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. It does this through the promotion of the Bill of Rights debate, engagement and lobbying of governments, political parties, other stakeholders and the development of strong civil society support in favour of a Bill of Rights in Northern Ireland.

For a full Consortium membership list please see **Annex A**.

## Bill of Rights process in NI

The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) has responsibility under the Northern Ireland Act 1998 for consulting and advising:

*“on the scope for defining, in Westminster legislation, rights supplementary to those in the European Convention on Human Rights, to reflect the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland, drawing as appropriate on international instruments and experience. These additional rights to reflect the principles of mutual respect for the identity and ethos of both communities and parity of esteem, and - taken together with the ECHR - to constitute a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland.”<sup>1</sup>*

The NIHRC advanced this duty by carrying out an extensive public consultation in Northern Ireland in 2000/2001 aimed at developing concrete proposals on the content of a Bill of Rights. Despite much work at the time by the NIHRC there was not full political participation in the consultation process and debate. Additionally, the resulting recommendations did not receive substantial political or civic society support.

Following the suspension of devolution in Northern Ireland in 2002 the Bill of Rights process was effectively shelved until provision was made for a Bill of Rights Forum in the St Andrews Agreement (November 2006) prior to power-sharing and devolved government being restored to Northern Ireland in May 2007.

The Bill of Rights Forum provided a setting for an equal number of civic society representatives and representatives of all political parties in Northern

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<sup>1</sup> The Act put the provisions of the Belfast Agreement, also known as the Good Friday Agreement into legislation. The Agreement was signed on 10<sup>th</sup> April 1998, <http://www.nio.gov.uk/agreement.pdf> The NIHRC's responsibilities under the Act and the NI Bill of Rights process which has been underway for over eight years, should not be confused with recent developments and debates in the rest of the UK about the potential for a British Bill of Rights. The NI Bill of Rights process has a different genesis and is much further advanced than this debate.

Ireland to discuss the specific content of a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland and make recommendations on the same to the NIHRC who would then, under its statutory duty, provide advice to the UK government. The Forum was successful in addressing the previous lack of full political engagement in the Bill of Rights process. Its report has now been submitted to the NIHRC, which plans to make its final recommendations to the Secretary of State by the 10<sup>th</sup> December 2008.

The report itself includes strong protections for civil and political rights including among others the right to life, to physical integrity, freedom from torture and all cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment and punishment, freedom from slavery and forced labour, right to liberty and security of the person, right to privacy and family life, freedom of thought, conscience and religion, freedom of expression and freedom of association and peaceful assembly.

The full text of the Bill of Rights Forum report is available at - [http://www.billofrightsforum.org/borf\\_final\\_report.pdf](http://www.billofrightsforum.org/borf_final_report.pdf)

## **UK Government**

The Consortium believes that the Bill of Rights process in Northern Ireland presents the UK Government with a unique opportunity to build upon the existing human rights protections already provided in the Human Rights Act (1998).

A Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland is an important mechanism for the domestic protection of rights and in particular could guarantee that all rights contained in the ICCPR are brought into domestic effect in Northern Ireland, therefore increasing the civil and political rights protections available in Northern Ireland and bringing them into line with international standards.

## **Proposed Questions to UK Government**

**The Committee may wish to ask the government** what commitment it will give to the development of a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland beyond the receipt of recommendations from the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC).

**The Committee may wish to ask the government whether** they will use the opportunity of the development of a Bill of Rights in Northern Ireland to include the full range of civil and political rights in accordance with their obligations under the ICCPR.

## **Appendices**

### **Annex A**

#### Membership list of the Human Rights Consortium

Action on Medical Negligence Association  
Advice NI  
Afro-Community Support Organisation NI  
Age Concern Northern Ireland  
Al-Nisa Association NI  
Alternatives NI  
Amnesty International  
An Munia Tober  
Barnardos  
Belfast & District Trades Council  
Belfast Carers' Centre  
Belfast Unemployed Resource Centre  
Carers Northern Ireland  
Carers UK, Belfast Central Branch  
Centre for Global Education  
Children in NI  
Children in Crossfire  
Children's Law Centre  
Community Foundation for Northern Ireland  
Chinese Welfare Association  
Coalition on Sexual Orientation  
Committee on the Administration of Justice  
Community Development & Health Network  
Community Dialogue  
Community Change  
Community Relations Forum  
Confederation of Community Groups  
Conflict Trauma Resource Centre  
Contact A Family  
Conference of religious of Ireland  
Corrymeela Community  
Council for the Homeless (NI)  
Democratic Dialogue  
Dennett Interchange  
Derry Trades Council  
Disability Action  
Disability Action Human Rights Centre  
Ely Centre

EPIC – Ex Prisoners Interpretive Centre  
Family Planning Association  
Good Shepherd Congregation  
Groundwork NI  
Hands That Talk  
Help the Aged  
HIV Support Centre  
Housing Rights Service  
Include Youth  
Indian Community Centre  
Interaction Belfast  
INTERCOMM  
Irish Congress of Trade Unions  
Irish Congress of Trade Unions - NI Committee  
Kilcranny House  
Latinoamerica Unida  
Law Centre (NI)  
Linc Resource Centre  
Making Women Seen and Heard  
Mencap  
Mercy Sisters  
Multi-Cultural Resource Centre  
Newstart Education Centre  
Northern Ireland African Cultural Centre  
Northern Ireland Anti-Poverty Network  
Northern Ireland Assoc. of Citizen Advice Bureaux  
Northern Ireland Business Education Partnership  
NICDA Social Economy Network  
Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education  
Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action  
NI Women's European Platform  
Northern Ireland Youth Forum  
Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders  
Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities  
Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA)  
North West Community Network  
North West Consortium on Human Rights  
North West Forum of People with Disabilities  
NUS/USI (National Union of Students/Union of Students in Ireland)  
Old Warren Partnership  
Omagh Ethnic Communities Support Group  
Omagh Forum for Rural Associations  
Organisation of the Unemployed Northern Ireland  
PAKT (Parents and Kids Together)

Parkanaur College  
Pat Finucane Centre  
Peace People  
Pobal  
Participation and the Practice of Rights Project  
Rainbow Project  
Relate Northern Ireland  
Rethink Severe Mental Illness  
Rights in Community Care  
Rural Community Network  
Save the Children  
South Down Action on Healing Wounds  
Seymour Hill and Conway Community  
Simon Community Northern Ireland  
Social Economy Agency  
Soroptomist International  
Springboard Opportunities  
Star Neighbourhood Centre  
St Columb's Park House  
STEER Mental Health  
South Tyrone Empowerment Programme  
Terry Enright Foundation  
The Nexus Institute  
Training for Women Network  
Ulster Human Rights Watch  
Ulster Peoples College  
UNISON Northern Ireland  
Upper Springfield Development Trust  
Victim Support  
WAVE Trauma Centre  
West Belfast Partnership Board  
Willowbank Community Resource Centre  
Windsor Women's Centre  
Women into Politics  
Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland  
Women's Information Group  
Women's Support Network  
Workers Educational Association  
Women's Resource and Development Agency  
Young Citizens in Action  
Youthnet