



Joint Committee on Human Rights

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From Rt Hon Harriet Harman MP, Chair

Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice
Ministry of Justice
102 Petty France
London
SW1H 9AJ

4 November 2015

Dear Michael,

I am writing following the establishment of the Joint Committee on Human Rights last Wednesday.

I thought it might be helpful if I set out a number of issues that my Committee is likely to take an interest in with respect to the Government's proposals for a new UK Bill of Rights.

The Committee would like to contribute to the consultation. Accordingly, it would be useful to have some indication of proposed timings. Ministerial responses to parliamentary questions have suggested that the Government intends to follow the usual 12 week consultation period. This is a very short time to deal with what is likely to be a complicated and contentious issue. Furthermore, we have no indication as to whether the Government intends to publish a White Paper, draft clauses, or indeed a draft Bill for pre-legislative scrutiny. In order for my Committee to play a useful role in the scrutiny of any new Bill of Rights, it would be extremely helpful if we could be provided with some detail on these matters.

We would also like to suggest that, in order to assist public understanding of the issues, all submissions to the Government's consultation be published on the gov.uk website. My Committee would be grateful to have sight of all submissions as they are received, in order to inform our deliberations. We will be interested to hear whether the Government is proposing any initiatives to engage with the public at large on this important subject (rather than just interested stakeholders) and to know the expected budget of the consultation exercise.

I am sure you recognise, the devolved institutions will need to be consulted on any proposals for a new UK Bill of Rights. The Committee is also likely to wish to engage with interested parties in the devolved assemblies and Governments. It would be helpful to understand what approach the Government is going to take to ensure that the views of the different parts of the United Kingdom are heard.

you

The Committee would like to confirm that the Government has officially ruled out withdrawing from the European Convention on Human Rights. It would also like to get a clear picture as to whether the Government's proposals will be consistent with the UK continuing to honour its international law obligation under Article 46 of the European Convention on Human Rights "to abide by the final judgment of the European Court of Human Rights in any case to which they are parties." In particular, the Committee would like to rule out any suggestion that the UK intends to resile from this obligation.

Finally, you will be aware that concerns have been expressed about how any changes to the human rights framework will impact on Britain's standing abroad. Please could you identify how the Foreign and Commonwealth Office have been included in the consultation?

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Harriet Harman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rt Hon. Harriet Harman

Chair of the Joint Committee on Human Rights