



## The Human Rights Act: proposals for reform

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The Human Rights Act 1998 was enacted by the previous Labour Government with the aim of “bringing rights home”. For the first time it made the rights enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights directly enforceable in the domestic courts. However, less than ten years after its inception the major political parties started to talk of reform, in the face of media hostility and a lack of public enthusiasm for a law erroneously perceived to be foreign and to the principal benefit of criminals and terrorists.

After the formation of the coalition Government in 2010, a Commission was established to consider the creation of a British Bill of Rights. However, the diversity of views held by the Commissioners meant that they were unable to reach a unanimous agreement on the best way forward. Whilst the majority were broadly in favour of a Bill of Rights, they were concerned that the timing of any such proposal should be sensitive to the outcome of the referendum on Scottish independence and the need to consider the wider constitutional implications.

Since the publication of the Report of the Commission on a Bill of Rights, the Government have not issued a formal policy response. However, the Conservatives have indicated that they are in the process of formulating their own proposals, and it seems likely that the future of the Human Rights Act will be one of the issues covered by the main parties’ manifestos for the 2015 general election.

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**1 Background**

***The Human Rights Act 1998***

The *Human Rights Act 1998* (“HRA”), introduced by the previous Labour Government, provides legal remedies for violations of the rights enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights. The Act came into force in October 2000. It requires courts and tribunals to take account of judgments of the European Convention on Human Rights where they are relevant, and for legislation to be read and given effect in a way which is compatible with the Convention rights so far as possible. Where a higher court considers that a provision in an Act of Parliament is not compatible with a Convention right, the HRA empowers the court to make a declaration of incompatibility.<sup>1</sup> The Act also makes it unlawful for any public authority, including courts, to act in a way which is incompatible with a Convention right. However, this does not include either House of Parliament.<sup>2</sup>

In its White Paper which preceded the Act, *Rights Brought Home: The Human Rights Bill*, the Labour Government suggested that the Convention rights were not seen as British and:

Enforcing them takes too long and costs too much. ... Bringing these rights home will mean that the British people will be able to argue for their rights in the British courts – without this inordinate delay and cost. It will also mean that the rights will be brought much more fully into the jurisprudence of the courts throughout the United Kingdom, and their interpretation will thus be far more subtly and powerfully woven into our law. And there will be another distinct benefit. British judges will be enabled to make distinctively British contribution to the development of the jurisprudence of human rights in Europe.<sup>3</sup>

***Political developments***

However, the HRA has not been entirely successful in “bringing rights home”, at least as far as public perception is concerned. A degree of public and media hostility to the Act has developed since it came into force, alongside a perception that it represents the imposition of foreign legal concepts, designed to stymie parliamentary sovereignty. This has to some

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<sup>1</sup> Section 4(2)  
<sup>2</sup> Section 6(3)  
<sup>3</sup> Home Office *Rights Brought Home: The Human Rights Bill* Cm 3782 1997

degree been fuelled by politicians expressing frustration at the application of the Act by the courts.

In 2006 the Department for Constitutional Affairs conducted a *Review of the Implementation of the Human Rights Act* which concluded that “The Human Rights Act has been widely misunderstood by the public, and has sometimes been misapplied in a number of settings.”<sup>4</sup>

Also in 2006 David Cameron, then leader of the Opposition, proposed a British Bill of Rights and Responsibilities to ‘define the core values which give us our identity as a free nation’, and the repeal of the *Human Rights Act 1998*.<sup>5</sup>

In 2007 the Labour Government published the *Governance of Britain* Green Paper, which included the proposal for a ‘British Bill of Rights and Duties’, which would provide explicit recognition that human rights come with responsibilities and must be exercised in a way that respects the human rights of others.<sup>6</sup>

This was followed in 2009 by another Green Paper *Rights and Responsibilities: developing our constitutional framework*, which said that the HRA had been an important first step, but that a fuller articulation of British values, while still incorporating Convention rights into UK law, would promote a stronger commitment to fundamental freedoms as well as providing “explicit recognition that human rights come with responsibilities.”<sup>7</sup>

In 2008 the Joint Committee on Human Rights published a report which concluded that the UK should adopt a Bill of Rights and Freedoms, continuing to incorporate Convention rights into UK law and setting out a “shared vision of a desirable future society: it should be aspirational in nature as well as protecting those human rights which already exist.”<sup>8</sup> The Report emphasised the need for a programme of public consultation and education in order to ensure ownership and consensus over the content.

In the run up to the 2010 general election, the Labour Party remained committed to maintaining the HRA, whilst exploring the possibility of a written constitution.<sup>9</sup>

The Conservative manifesto, by contrast, committed to replacing the HRA with a UK Bill of Rights in order to “protect our freedoms from state encroachment and encourage greater social responsibility”.<sup>10</sup>

A written constitution, incorporating a British Bill of Rights (including and building on the Convention rights), has been a long standing Liberal Democrat policy.<sup>11</sup> However the 2010 manifesto committed to protecting the HRA and promoting greater public understanding.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Department for Constitutional Affairs *Review of the Implementation of the Human Rights Act 2006*, executive summary. An archived copy is available from the [National Archives website](#)

<sup>5</sup> David Cameron *Balancing freedom and security: A modern British Bill of Rights* Speech to the Centre for Policy Studies, 26 June 2006

<sup>6</sup> *The Governance of Britain* Cm 7170, 2007

<sup>7</sup> Ministry of Justice *Rights and Responsibilities: developing our constitutional framework* 2009 Cm7577

<sup>8</sup> JCHR *A Bill of Rights for the UK?* HL Paper 165-I HC 150-I Session 2007-2008

<sup>9</sup> Labour Party *A Future Fair for All* 2010

<sup>10</sup> Conservative Party *Invitation to Join the Government of Britain: The Conservative Manifesto 2010* 2010

<sup>11</sup> *For the People, By the People* Liberal Democrat Policy Paper 83, August 2007

<sup>12</sup> *Liberal Democrat manifesto* 2010

## 2 Commission on a Bill of Rights

Following the formation of the Coalition Government in 2010, the Coalition Agreement stated:

We will establish a Commission to investigate the creation of a British Bill of Rights that incorporates and builds on all our obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights, ensures that these rights continue to be enshrined in British law, and protects and extends British liberties. We will seek to promote a better understanding of the true scope of these obligations and liberties.<sup>13</sup>

The Commission on a Bill of Rights was established by the Coalition Government in March 2011 with the following remit:

“To investigate the creation of a UK Bill of Rights that incorporates and builds on all our obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights, ensures that these rights continue to be enshrined in UK law, and protects and extends our liberties.

“To examine the operation and implementation of these obligations, and consider ways to promote a better understanding of the true scope of these obligations and liberties.

“To provide advice to the Government on the ongoing Interlaken process to reform the Strasbourg court ahead of and following the UK’s Chairmanship of the Council of Europe.

“To consult, including with the public, judiciary and devolved administrations and legislatures, and aim to report no later than by the end of 2012.”

The Commission, chaired by former civil servant Sir Leigh Lewis, had the following membership:<sup>14</sup>

- Professor Sir David Edwards QC
- Lord Faulks of Donnington QC
- Jonathan Fisher QC
- Martin Howe QC
- Baroness Kennedy of The Shaws QC
- Lord Lester of Herne Hill QC
- Professor Phillippe Sands QC
- Anthony Speaight QC<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *The Coalition: our programme for government* 2010

<sup>14</sup> Further information is available via the Ministry of Justice website: [www.justice.gov.uk/about/cbr/members](http://www.justice.gov.uk/about/cbr/members). Dr Michael Pinto-Duschinsky was appointed as one of the original members of the Commission but resigned in 2012 and was replaced by Lord Faulks.

<sup>15</sup> The members were appointed in equal numbers by the coalition partners. Sir David Edwards, Baroness Kennedy, Lord Lester and Phillippe Sands were the Liberal Democrat appointees; Lord Faulks, Jonathan Fisher, Martin Howe, and Anthony Speaight the Conservative appointees.

The Commission published a Discussion Paper in 2011<sup>16</sup> which posed the following questions:

(1) do you think we need a UK Bill of Rights?

If so,

(2) what do you think a UK Bill of Rights should contain?

(3) how do you think it should apply to the UK as a whole, including its four component countries of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales?

(4) having regard to our terms of reference, are there any other views which you would like to put forward at this stage?

A further consultation was published in July 2012 seeking more detailed views as to the form that a UK Bill of Rights should take.<sup>17</sup>

### **Responses**

The Commission received over one thousand responses to the two consultations, a small sample of which are extracted below:

*Liberty:* Liberty believes that all the Convention rights incorporated by the HRA deserve protection and we cannot imagine voluntarily parting with any of these vital safeguards against state oppression. In addition, we believe that the accessible and unique enforcement mechanisms provided by the HRA represent a bare minimum for rights enforcement in any UK Bill of Rights.<sup>18</sup>

*University of Cambridge Faculty of Law:* One of the ambitions of the HRA was to enable human rights issues to be litigated in domestic courts... This ambition has been realized, even though the substantial mythology surrounding the HRA has distorted public perceptions of its effects. Against this background, there is certainly a case for promoting better understanding of the UK's obligations under the ECHR... Whether the adoption of a 'UK Bill of Rights' would be of a piece with the ambition to demystify human rights law is, however, open to doubt.<sup>19</sup>

*British Institute of Human Rights:* On the face of it this Bill of Rights debate may seem like an opportunity to call for the legal protection of a broader range of rights beyond those in the HRA but we have serious reservations that this is not what is on the table and, in fact, that human rights may be weakened. The focus on expanding the list of human rights which are protected may (even inadvertently) be at the expense of underlining the importance of the mechanisms for making those rights enforceable.<sup>20</sup>

*Professor Francesca Klug and Helen Wildbore, London School of Economics:* To ensure a new Bill of Rights fulfilled the Commission's terms of reference, any additional rights would need to cover new ground, or transparently supplement ECHR rights. They should demonstrably enhance rights protection... On the basis of our research on

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<sup>16</sup> Commission on a Bill of Rights *Discussion Paper: Do we need a UK Bill of Rights?* 2011

<sup>17</sup> Commission on a Bill of Rights *A Second Consultation* July 2012

<sup>18</sup> Liberty *Human Rights or Citizens' Privileges? Liberty's Response to the Commission on a Bill of Rights Discussion Paper: Do we need a UK Bill of Rights?* December 2011. Available at [www.liberty-human-rights.org.uk](http://www.liberty-human-rights.org.uk)

<sup>19</sup> University of Cambridge *Faculty of Law Response to Commission on a Bill of Rights Discussion Paper: Do we need a UK Bill of Rights?* November 2011. Available at [www.law.cam.ac.uk](http://www.law.cam.ac.uk)

<sup>20</sup> British Institute of Human Rights *Response to the Commission on a UK Bill of Rights Discussion Paper* November 2011. Available at [www.bihhr.org.uk](http://www.bihhr.org.uk)

comparative Bills of Rights there is no instance we can find where a Bill of Rights has been passed in order to reduce the accountability of the executive or legislature to the courts, rather than the other way round.<sup>21</sup>

*Scottish Human Rights Commission:* [T]he current political climate presents singularly unfavourable conditions in which to launch a consultation on a UK Bill of Rights and proposes alternative steps which are more likely to lead to progressive, rather than retrogressive, outcomes for the public.<sup>22</sup>

*London Metropolitan University:* [M]uch political (and especially Conservative) discourse about the need for either a 'British' or 'UK' Bill of Rights is predicated on the assertion that we do not already have one... This is not to suggest that a convincing case could not be made for developing a new Bill of Rights; for example, one that affords domestic recognition to economic and social rights. However, we suggest that a convincing case has not been articulated by those who have initiated the process of reform – including the Labour government in respect of its consultation in 2009 on a 'Bill of Rights and Responsibilities'.<sup>23</sup>

*Society of Conservative Lawyers:* The HRA itself is not working. A convention which was intended to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms has become associated instead in the public mind, not without some justification, with dubious compensation claims, complaints about the trivial, the protection of lawbreakers rather than the law abiding majority, a transfer of decision making on economic and social policy to judges and the enrichment of lawyers.<sup>24</sup>

*JUSTICE:* In our view, the HRA 1998 currently performs the core functions of a bill of rights for the UK. We are not persuaded that there is any evidence-based argument for change to the substantive and procedural guarantees in the Act, or that the current debate about a bill of rights for the UK is appropriate, at this time.<sup>25</sup>

## **Report**

The Commission published its Report *A UK Bill of Rights? The Choice Before Us*<sup>26</sup> in December 2012. However, the members were unable to agree a common position and therefore published individual papers setting out their respective positions alongside the report. The report acknowledged the “politically disparate”<sup>27</sup> nature of the membership, composed “of people who already had well defined views on the protection of fundamental rights”.<sup>28</sup>

The Commission’s conclusions are set out below:

12.1 We are united in believing that there needs to be respect for the existence of differing intellectually coherent and valid viewpoints in relation to the human rights debate, and that the debate needs to be well informed and not distorted by the

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<sup>21</sup> Professor F Klug & H Wildbore *Commission on a Bill of Rights Discussion Paper: 'Do We Need a UK Bill of Rights?'* November 2011. Available at [www.lse.ac.uk](http://www.lse.ac.uk)

<sup>22</sup> The Scottish Human Rights Commission *Submission to the Commission on a Bill of Rights* November 2011. Available from [www.scottishhumanrights.com](http://www.scottishhumanrights.com)

<sup>23</sup> London Metropolitan University *Human Rights and Social Justice Initiative response to Commission on a Bill of Rights Discussion Paper* November 2011. Available at [www.londonmet.ac.uk](http://www.londonmet.ac.uk)

<sup>24</sup> Lord Faulks QC, A Warnock & S Murray *Response on behalf of the Society of Conservative Lawyers to the Commission on a Bill of Rights Discussion Paper* October 2011. Available at [www.conservativelawyers.com](http://www.conservativelawyers.com)

<sup>25</sup> JUSTICE *Commission on a Bill of Rights: Do we need a UK Bill of Rights?* December 2011. Available at [www.justice.org.uk](http://www.justice.org.uk)

<sup>26</sup> The Commission on a Bill of Rights *A UK Bill of Rights? The Choice Before Us* 18 December 2012

<sup>27</sup> Para 3.

<sup>28</sup> Para 1

stereotypes and caricatures which have all too often characterised that debate in recent years

12.2 None of us considers that the idea of a UK Bill of Rights in principle should be finally rejected at this stage. We all consider that, at the least, it is an idea of potential value which deserves further exploration at an appropriate time and in an appropriate way.

12.3 Any future debate on a UK Bill of Rights must be acutely sensitive to issues of devolution and, in the case of Scotland, to possible independence, and it must involve the devolved administrations.

12.4 We are also acutely conscious of the sensitivities attached to discussion of a UK Bill of Rights in the context of Northern Ireland. In particular we recognise the distinctive Northern Ireland Bill of Rights process and its importance to the peace process in Northern Ireland. We do not wish to interfere in that process in any way nor for any of the conclusions that we reach to be interpreted or used in such a way as to interfere in, or delay, the Northern Ireland Bill of Rights process.

12.5 We also recognise that any process of moving towards the creation of a UK Bill of Rights would have to be undertaken gradually, with full consultation, and with great care to avoid creating divisiveness and disharmony. To come to pass successfully a UK Bill of Rights would have to respect the different political and legal traditions within all of the countries of the UK, and to command public confidence beyond party politics and ideology. It would also, as a technical matter, involve reconsideration of the scheme of the devolution Acts, which limit the powers of the devolved legislatures and governments expressly by reference to respect for 'Convention rights'.

12.6 Whatever the outcome of the independence referendum in Scotland, it seems likely that there will subsequently be proposals for changes in the relationship of the nations that will then comprise the United Kingdom be that within a Constitutional Convention, as the Prime Minister has suggested, or in some other forum. Such a forum would be the most desirable place to consider the promotion of a UK Bill of Rights within the context of a wider constitutional review.

### The conclusions of the majority of members<sup>29</sup>

12.7 A majority of the members of the Commission, including the Chair, believe that, on balance, there is a strong argument in favour of a UK Bill of Rights. Those members holding this view note that the other 46 signatory states to the European Convention on Human Rights generally have their own written constitution, their own national bill of rights written in their own words or both. Indeed the UK is either alone or in a very small minority in not being in this position. In the view of these members, this would not greatly matter if there were widespread public acceptance of the legitimacy of our current human rights structures, including of the roles of the Convention and the European Court of Human Rights. But they believe there is not. It is this lack of 'ownership' by the public which is, in their view, the most powerful argument for a new constitutional instrument.

12.8 All of us believe that there is a role for better public education and understanding of the present human rights structures and their effect – indeed we hope that our own report will be a contribution to that – but the majority of members find it hard to persuade themselves that public perceptions are likely to change in any substantial way as a result, particularly given the highly polemical way in which these issues tend

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<sup>29</sup> Lord Lester, Lord Faulks, Sir David Edwards, Anthony Speaight, Martin Howe, Jonathan Fisher.

to be presented by both some commentators and some sections of the media. It follows that most members believe that more of the same is likely to lead simply to more of the same; a highly polarised division of views between those for and against our current human rights structures.

12.9 A majority of members believe that the present position is unlikely to be a stable one. Some of the voices both for and against the current structures are now so strident, and public debate so polarised, that there is a strong argument for a fresh beginning. The conclusion of a majority of the Commission's members is accordingly that the case has been made out in principle for a UK Bill of Rights protecting everyone within the jurisdiction of the UK. In accordance with the Commission's terms of reference this conclusion is put forward on the basis that such a Bill would incorporate and build on all of the UK's obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights. However, the wider constitutional and political dimension is also of crucial significance in considering the way forward towards the introduction of a Bill of Rights, and it is essential that it provides no less protection than is contained in the Human Rights Act and the devolution settlements, although some of us believe that it could usefully define more clearly the scope of some rights and adjust the balance between different rights.

12.10 In the view of the majority of members, an important further reason (and for some of them a particularly compelling reason) in favour of such a Bill is that it would offer the opportunity to provide greater protection against the possible abuse of power by the state and its agents. In the final analysis, in the view of these members, decisions on the extent of the powers of the state must be for Parliament. But they believe that the experience to date of the Human Rights Act is that a statute expressly protecting basic rights and freedoms can provide a valuable safeguard against any such abuse of power.

12.11 The majority are agreed that such a Bill should have at its core the rights currently in the European Convention on Human Rights including those Protocols which the United Kingdom has accepted. That does not necessarily mean, however, that they would have to be written in identical language. On the contrary given that for the members concerned the key argument is the need to create greater public ownership of a UK Bill of Rights than currently attaches to the Human Rights Act it would clearly be desirable in principle if such a Bill was written in language which reflected the distinctive history and heritage of the countries within the United Kingdom.

### The conclusions of the minority of members<sup>30</sup>

12.12 A minority of members believe that the moment is not ripe for the conclusion that a future process should be focused on a new UK Bill of Rights, not least since they believe that the majority has failed to identify or declare any shortcomings in the Human Rights Act or its application by our courts. They consider that it would be preferable to leave open the possibility of a number of options that, without prioritisation, could be addressed by a future Constitutional Convention. These include maintaining the status quo, adopting a new and free-standing Bill of Rights, or moving to new constitutional arrangements that would incorporate and build upon the rights protected by the Human Rights Act.

12.13 These members base this view on three factors. The first factor is devolution. Noting that, since the Commission was established, a date has been set for a referendum on Scottish independence, an event the outcome of which could have significant consequences for the whole of the United Kingdom, and that, even without

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<sup>30</sup> Baroness Kennedy, Phillipe Sands.

this event, there are calls for greater autonomy as the UK moves incrementally towards a federal structure, these members are greatly concerned that a premature move to a UK Bill of Rights would be contentious and possibly even dangerous, with unintended consequences, and that some members of the Commission have failed to acknowledge the full implications of the relationship between a possible UK Bill of Rights and the United Kingdom's other constitutional arrangements. They believe that any Bill of Rights – and any proposals – would have to reflect the changing allocation of powers in the reconfiguration of the United Kingdom.

12.14 The second factor relates to the views expressed in the Commission's consultations and work programme. These members note that their views are aligned with the views of respondents to the Commission's consultations, as this report recognises, in the sense of overwhelming support to retain the system established by the Human Rights Act (and very considerable opposition, for now at least, to the idea of a UK Bill of Rights). Moreover, it is abundantly clear in the view of these members that there is no 'ownership' issue in Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland (or large parts of England), where the existing arrangements under the Human Rights Act and the European Convention on Human Rights are not merely tolerated but strongly supported.

12.15 The third factor concerns the view expressed in the course of the Commission's deliberations by a number of their colleagues on the Commission, to the effect that they would like the United Kingdom to withdraw from the European Convention on Human Rights (though they accept, equally, that others in the majority would join with them in envisaging no circumstances in which they would support such a move). This has alerted these members to what they believe is the real possibility that some people support a UK Bill of Rights as a path towards withdrawal from the European Convention.

12.16 Against this background, these members consider that the case for a UK Bill of Rights has not been made, and that the arguments put to the Commission against such a Bill remain more persuasive, at least for now. These members remain open to the idea of a UK Bill of Rights were they to be satisfied that it carried no risk of decoupling the UK from the Convention. Indeed, they fear that the single argument relied upon by the majority – the issue of public ownership of 'rights' – will be used to promote other aims, including the diminution of rights available to all people in our community, and a decoupling of the United Kingdom from the European Convention on Human Rights.<sup>31</sup>

### **3 Developments since the publication of the report**

The Government have not formally responded to the Report, and have indicated that they do not intend to do so.<sup>32</sup>

The House of Lords debated the report on 20 June 2013.<sup>33</sup> Responding to the debate the Minister, Lord McNally, said:

I am extremely proud to be the Human Rights Minister in this Government. I work very closely with my colleague Damian Green on this matter. This has been a healthy debate. I suspect that the next stage of it, as far as any legislation is concerned, will depend on the outcome of the next general election—it will be incumbent on all the political parties to take their views on the Human Rights Act and its future to the

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<sup>31</sup> Pages 175-178

<sup>32</sup> [HC Deb 22 January 2013 c215W](#)

<sup>33</sup> [HL Deb 20 June 2013 cc431-465](#)

hustings. I think that I know where we will be and I look forward to this ongoing debate.<sup>34</sup>

At the 2013 Conservative Party Conference, Home Secretary Theresa May said in her speech that “The next Conservative manifesto will promise to scrap the Human Rights Act. ... the Conservative position is clear – if leaving the European Convention is what it takes to fix our human rights law, that is what we should do.”<sup>35</sup>

Secretary of State for Justice, Chris Grayling, said the Conservatives would publish a document in 2014 “setting out what we will do, when we will do it, and how we will do it”, followed by a draft bill setting out the legal detail later in the year.<sup>36</sup>

Chris Grayling gave evidence to the Joint Committee on Human Rights on 18 December 2013 on the Government’s human rights policy.<sup>37</sup> Asked about the differences between the two coalition partners he said:

Where there are difficulties politically they are bound to manifest themselves more over the last 18 months before the general election campaign begins. It is an area where we have been very clear and open in saying that there are differences between the two coalition parties. I do not think that there is any point in claiming otherwise—one has to be grown-up about it. But in the coalition agreement we have an agreement that we will continue to be part of the European convention through this Parliament, we will continue to play a role in the Council of Europe through this Parliament, and then the two parties will separately place their thoughts before the electorate and we will see what happens after the election.

Asked about Conservative policy in this area, and his own views, he said:

The reality is that no institution can survive in a democracy if it does not have the consent of the people. The truth is that the European Court of Human Rights has, in my view, lost democratic legitimacy in this country by moving its jurisprudence into areas where it should not be. As a result, our future relationship with it is in doubt. If the judges are now themselves saying that this is an area where we need to reach resolution, that is a sign that they have also recognised that it has lost democratic legitimacy.

...

No work is being carried out by the Government or the Civil Service in relation to our potentially leaving or varying our involvement in the convention. The Conservative Party is doing its own policy work, which it will produce in due course, but there is no public involvement in that work.

...

It is my view that human rights are and will remain crucial to this country. I have said on record more than once that I regard the convention as a laudable statement of the principles which should underpin a modern, democratic nation. This country has always been a beacon for human rights. You will be aware that the Joint Committee considering the issue of prisoner voting took evidence from one of the senior officials at the European Court of Human Rights, who, if I remember rightly, described Britain as

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<sup>34</sup> C464.

<sup>35</sup> The Guardian [Conservatives promise to scrap Human Rights Act after next election](#) 30 September 2013

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>37</sup> Joint Committee on Human Rights [Minutes of Evidence](#) HC 915 18 December 2013

being best in class. I think the question is that when the best in class starts to query the nature of the class, there is food for thought for everyone involved. I regard high standards of human rights both in this country and around the world as of great importance.

...

We have been through hundreds of years with our common-law system. I think that on the whole we have tended to be ahead of the rest of the world in terms of human rights standards, liberalising our laws, widening our franchise, and so on and so forth. So I do not believe that the European jurisdiction of either Luxembourg or Strasbourg makes this country a better place than it would otherwise be.

...

You will have to wait to see what my and my party's view is, which will come rather sooner than 2015, but then we will see if the electorate want to give us the chance to enact it after that.