

Bill of Rights Forum

www.billofrightsforum.org

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THE BILL OF RIGHTS FORUM ON THE ROAD

The Northern Ireland Bill of Rights Forum is looking forward to meeting outside Belfast for the first time, said Chris Sidoti, who arrives in Belfast today.

"For Forum members, the Bill of Rights is for everyone. If it's to be effective, the Forum needs to hear from as many people as possible. As part of that commitment, this Friday we are meeting in Derry/Londonderry" Mr Sidoti said.

"This is a city of particular social, political, and historical significance in Northern Ireland. I personally look forward to the visit. I am pleased that I will be able to meet with local community organisations in different parts of the city, and to listen to what people there really want from a Bill of Rights. I am pleased too that the Forum will have a public session at the Calgach Centre so that interested local people can attend and see our work in action.

"We are pleased that Gerry Kelly MLA is going to address the Forum at its meeting on Friday," Mr Sidoti continued, "and we look forward to welcoming Ian Paisley Jr MLA at a future date. The Forum very much welcomes the Northern Ireland Executive's continued commitment to the Bill of Rights process.

"Forum members will also spend the better part of two days in discussions with international human rights experts on issues such as equality and discrimination, economic and social rights, the European Convention on Human Rights and the scope and effect of the UK Human Rights Act. The Forum will also discuss the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland that a Bill of Rights must address. These discussions

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will inform our deliberations on what should go into a Bill of Rights.

“The public will be very welcome at the Forum meeting commencing at 10:30am on Friday 12 October at the Calgach Centre. And I again invite people interested in the Bill of Rights to get in touch with us, especially through our website www.billofrightsforum.org.”

The seventh meeting of the Forum will be held at the Calgach Business Centre, Butcher Street, Londonderry on Friday 12 October. The plenary session will run from 1:30pm till 3:30pm; Gerry Kelly MLA will address the Forum at 10:30am.

The Forum Secretariat can be contacted by e-mail (info@billofrightsforum.org), phone or fax (028 9054 4922), SMS (07812 351039), or mail (1st Floor, Interpoint, 20-24 York Street, Belfast BT15 1AQ).

Notes to Editors

Chris Sidoti

Since 2003 Chris has been director of the International Service for Human Rights, a non-government organisation, based in Geneva, Switzerland, that works closely with the United Nations human rights system. A human rights lawyer, activist and teacher, he has been Australian Human Rights Commissioner (1995-2000), Australian Law Reform Commissioner (1992-1995), and Foundation Director of the Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (1987-1992). He has also worked in non-government organisations, including the Human Rights Council of Australia and the Australian Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace. While based in Australia until 2003, he worked extensively in the Asia Pacific region undertaking human rights training, policy and advisory work in many countries. He is a visiting professor at the University of Western Sydney and Griffith University in Australia.

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Establishment of the Forum, and the timeframe for it to convene its inaugural meeting was announced following discussions at St Andrews. Following a recent consultation on the Forum, the Government announced its final plans for the Forum on 12 December.

The DUP, Sinn Fein, UUP and SDLP each have 3 seats on the Forum and the Alliance Party has 2 seats.

Civic Society is represented by Employers, Trade Unions, and Churches which each have 2 seats, as well as 1 representative from each of the following sectors: children and young people; people with disabilities; ethnic minorities; older people; people of different

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sexual orientations; women; the human rights sector; and the community / voluntary sector as a whole.

The Forum has seven working groups looking at:

Children and young people

Women

Criminal justice and victims

Economic and social rights, including relevant equality issues

Culture and identity and language

Civil and political rights, including relevant equality issues

Preamble, enforceability and implementation

The Forum is expected to complete its work by the end of March 2008, extended from December 2007 at the request of the Forum Chair.

The Secretary to the Forum is Gillian Preece, and the Secretariat is based at 1st Floor, Interpoint, 20-24 York Street, Belfast, BT15 1AQ, 028 9054 4922, info@billofrightsforum.org