

Bill of Rights Forum

www.billofrightsforum.org

Interpoint Centre
20-24 York Street
Belfast
BT15 1AQ

Press Release 6 December 2007

THE BILL OF RIGHTS FORUM: HARD AT WORK!

The Northern Ireland Bill of Rights Forum is working its way steadily through the many difficult issues in developing proposals for a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland and is on track to report on 31 March next year, said its Chair, Chris Sidoti, in Belfast today.

"This is a demanding time," Mr Sidoti said, "as the Forum begins to move into the discussion of actual recommendations that might go forward to the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission.

"In doing this, we need to resolve one outstanding issue from our terms of reference, what we understand by the term 'the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland'. The term comes from the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement and is included in the terms of reference on which we have to report. This issue is to be addressed in a challenging, but important, discussion this Friday.

"The Forum will also be hearing on Friday from the Chief Commissioner of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, Professor Monica McWilliams, who will brief the Forum on her Commission's preparations for receiving our recommendations."

Mr Sidoti also spoke about the Forum's progress in developing the specific recommendations to the Commission.

"The Forum has seven working groups on various issues to be addressed in the development of a Bill of Rights. This week those working groups will complete drafts of their reports for preliminary discussion by the Forum at its second meeting this month, on Friday 14 December. Working group members have shown their dedication to the task in the time

Tel: 028 9054 4922 Text: 078 1235 1039
Fax: 028 9054 4924 Email: info@billofrightsforum.org

and effort they have put into their deliberations to date. I'm looking forward very much to seeing their thinking and to hearing the responses of the Forum as a whole."

Mr Sidoti also spoke about the Forum's outreach programme.

"We have now appointed four half time outreach workers, who get out and about with the draft reports and talk to various groups across Northern Ireland to collect their impressions too."

Finally, Mr Sidoti outlined the Forum's future meeting schedule.

"Tomorrow's Forum meeting is the last half day meeting. From now on we'll be deliberating for a full day at a time, as material we need to consider increases in volume and importance. We will hold two meetings in December (7 and 14 December), two more early in the new year (1 and 8 February) and at least two in March (12 and 18 March).

"The public will be very welcome at this Friday's Forum meeting and at all future meetings."

The ninth meeting of the Forum will be held at the Interpoint Centre, York Street, Belfast on Friday 7 December, starting at 9:30am. .

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.

Bill of Rights Forum

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

Tel: 028 9054 4922 Text: 078 1235 1039
Fax: 028 9054 4924 Email: info@billofrightsforum.org

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 will 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