

Press Release 13 December 2007

THE BILL OF RIGHTS FORUM: DISCUSSING FIRST FINDINGS

The Northern Ireland Bill of Rights Forum is turning its discussions to the first specific findings of its seven working groups as it continues its work on a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland, said its Chair, Chris Sidoti, in Belfast today.

"The content of a Bill of Rights is clearly our top priority," Mr Sidoti said, "and that's what we're now, finally, beginning to get to grips with. Our discussion last week of the issues arising from our terms of reference was extremely productive and has allowed the Forum now to approach the main part of its task with some parameters agreed.

"The seven working groups of the Forum have been looking at the various specific areas of a Bill of Rights – the rights of children and young people, for example, and the question of whether economic and social rights are needed, and if so how best they can be expressed. The meeting on Friday will begin to hear, and consider, the specific recommendations those working groups are putting forward. In turn, the working groups will get Forum's first impressions of those recommendations."

Mr Sidoti also spoke about the Forum's desire to hear from members of the community as it develops its specific recommendations to the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission.

"The draft reports that the working groups have produced are on our website (www.billofrightsforum.org) and we would welcome views from any with an interest. Any views that are submitted to us will be forwarded to the relevant working groups for them to consider as they finalise their reports."

"Tomorrow's Forum meeting is the last meeting that will be held at the Interpoint Centre. From the new year meetings will be held in larger premises to allow greater numbers of the public to observe. Details will be put on the website when they become available."

The tenth meeting of the Forum will be held at the Interpoint Centre, York Street, Belfast on Friday 14 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