

Bill of Rights

Forum

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THE BILL OF RIGHTS FORUM: STARTING THE REAL WORK

Speaking in advance of the next meeting of the Bill of Rights Forum, the chair, Chris Sidoti, described it as **"the beginning of the real work"**. The Forum will meet in its third session on Friday 11 May in Belfast.

He said: **"Unless the Bill of Rights addresses issues that are real and important to the men, women and children of Northern Ireland in their daily lives, there'll be no point to it. It simply must address the needs and experiences of all the people here.**

"Forum members must play a significant part in this. Their organisations are spread throughout Northern Ireland and have the best links with communities at all levels and in all districts.

"I personally need to hear directly from people in Northern Ireland too. Once we decide our programme at Friday's meeting I will be seeking opportunities to meet people in various parts of Northern Ireland and learn what they want in a Bill of Rights. I would also like to hear from anyone who wishes to write to me with their views. They can contact me at the Forum's secretariat by e-mail, phone or mail.

"The Forum has been given a big and important task. I continue to be impressed by the wealth of experience and enthusiasm that all members of the Forum bring to it.

"On Friday we will spend some time looking at the international human rights standards. We agreed at our last meeting that they would be the baseline for our work. We will also decide on our work programme and process for this year, including how to ensure that the people of Northern

Ireland know about the Bill of Rights and contribute to its development. ”

The third meeting of the Forum will be held in the Wellington Park Hotel, Belfast on Friday 11 May from 9.30am till 3.30pm. It will focus on the international human rights standards that will form the foundation of the Bill of Rights, the Forum's process and work programme and its strategy to engage with people in Northern Ireland as widely as possible.

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

The Forum is expected to complete its work by the end of December 2007.

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