

JUSTICE PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE - 18 MARCH 2011

JUSTICE's response to the Bill of Rights Commission

The government today announced a Commission to investigate the case for a UK Bill of Rights, to be chaired by Sir Leigh Lewis KCB, a retired senior civil servant. Members of the Commission include Sir David Edward PC QC, a former judge of the European Court of Justice; Lord Lester of Herne Hill QC; Professor Philippe Sands QC; and Baroness Helena Kennedy of the Shaws QC, the chair of JUSTICE.

Today's announcement fulfils the promise contained in the Coalition programme for government in May last year to establish a Commission to examine the case for a Bill of Rights that 'incorporates and builds on all our obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights'. Identical language is used in the Commission's terms of reference published today.

In addition, the government has also announced the establishment of an advisory panel 'to provide advice and expertise to the Commission on issues arising in relation to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland'.

In February 2010, JUSTICE published a report on *Devolution and Human Rights* which predicted that, due to the devolution settlement, any attempt to repeal or substantially amend the Human Rights Act would likely 'prove a legal and political nightmare'.

Roger Smith, JUSTICE's director, said:

Our obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights are not up for negotiation, as the Commission's own terms of reference correctly recognise.

We trust that the Commission's work will also lead to better public understanding of the Human Rights Act, and how it is woven into our constitutional framework.

For further comment, please contact Eric Metcalfe, JUSTICE's human rights policy director, on 020 7762 6414 (direct line), 07939 119 369 (mobile) or emetcalfe@justice.org.uk.

Notes for editors

1. In addition to Sir Leigh, Sir David, Baroness Kennedy, Lord Lester, and Professor Sands, the other members of the Commission are Jonathan Fisher QC, Martin Howe QC, Dr Michael Pinto-Duchinsky, and Anthony Speaight QC.
2. The Commission's terms of reference states that it should aim to report no later than the end of 2012. The full terms of reference are available at www.justice.gov.uk/news/newsrelease180311a.htm.
3. JUSTICE has published extensively on the issue of a Bill of Rights for the UK, including *A British Bill of Rights: Informing the Debate* (2007) and *Devolution and Human Rights* (2010). Electronic copies of these reports are available on request.

Chairman of Council **Baroness Kennedy of The Shaws QC** *Director* **Roger Smith OBE**

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