

HRCS Annual Conference 2015: What next for human rights?

25th June 2015

Speakers and delegates were invited to answer the question “What next for human rights” in the light of the general election result and the announcement in the Queen’s speech that the HRA was to be abolished and a consultation launched on a Bill of Rights.

Presentations included:

What Next for Human Rights in Scotland? – The HRCS gives its own view.

Carole Ewart, Co-ordinator of HRCS [HRCS speech](#)

Protecting and Promoting Human Rights in Scotland – The Scottish Government

Alex Neil, Cabinet Secretary with responsibility for Social Justice, Human Rights, Communities and Pensioners’ Rights.

What next for human rights in Scotland – The view of National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs)

Euan Page EHRC Scotland

Nico Juetten, SCCYP [SCCYP 25th June](#)

Devolution Implications – A Northern Ireland Perspective

Brian Gormally, Director of the Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ) delivered a presentation and provided a handout [Fighting the Repeal of the Human Rights Act](#)

Report back from workshops

Eight workshops were held and similar themes emerged:

- People and organisations need to be persuaded of the value and benefit of human rights as this will strengthen their instinctive support for the HRA
- Need more practical examples of how human rights have made a difference to organisations, to groups of peoples and to individuals. That will encourage the 41% of people conflicted about human rights to become supporters of human rights.
- Human rights should be directly connected with the struggles which people face such as the impact of austerity, poverty, access to justice. Also to highlight how some groups are facing particular disadvantage such as people who have mental health issues.
- Need to reach out and work with trade unions and other bodies which are part of civil society as strength comes from co-operation, and unlikely partnerships!
- Good that HRCS can focus on human rights as it fills an unmet need.

The future of human rights in Scotland and our next steps

The roundtable discussion on how civil society can ensure a co-ordinated strategy to defend and promote human rights built upon the discussions in the workshop. It was agreed that:

- Many organisations are facing real pressures on their time and resources so it is really useful to have the HRCS which can provide an informed, focus for action.

- Need to build the network further, and encourage and enable more people to become human rights advocates in general and activists for the HRA in particular.
- Useful for the HRCS to distribute its existing resources more widely and for members to roll them out through their networks so that the biggest possible audience is reached.
- Many people need to be persuaded of the value of human rights and so HRCS events held and information crafted should showcase the difference they make, and ensure a fairer Scotland.
- sensible for HRCS's work to show how human rights can help address existing problems eg making the connection between trade union rights and human rights.
- Good to hear the Cabinet Secretary lend his support to the creation of a Human Rights Committee at the Scottish Parliament but need to think about whether it should be merged with Equality which currently, and rightly, has a subject committee to its own.
- Funding for the HRCS will determine what action it is able to lead on in the future. Members and supporters were encouraged to think about how they can support the HRCS so that its funding future is brighter.

SCVO's Third Force News invited HRCS to write a Blog about the conference and our campaign to save the HRA. You can read this [here](#).