

Bill of Rights Forum

www.billofrightsforum.org

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Press Release

THE BILL OF RIGHTS FORUM SUBMITS ITS ADVICE TO THE NORTHERN IRELAND HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

Chris Sidoti, the Chair of the Northern Ireland Bill of Rights Forum, today handed the Forum's recommendations to Monica McWilliams, Chief Commissioner at the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission.

"I am very pleased to hand the Forum's report to the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission," said Mr Sidoti, at the handover event at the Hilton Hotel. "Experience around the world has shown that Bills of Rights can be vital tools to help societies make the transition from conflict to real peace. The wide range of issues covered in this report have exactly that aim in mind, as they seek to entrench the values that will underpin Northern Ireland society in the years to come.

"The Forum itself has been a mechanism to promote those values. It has been a unique experience of political and community leaders in this society collaborating constructively in the work of building Northern Ireland's future. It has provided an excellent basis for further collaboration on human rights across political parties and across communities.

"The report represents an enormous amount of work on the part of the members of the Forum and its working groups, to all of whom I am very grateful. It should provide the Commission with a valuable resource as it formulates its own advice to the Secretary of State.

"The final report of the Forum can be found at <http://www.billofrightsforum.org>."

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The final report of the Bill of Rights Forum was formally submitted to the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission at the Hilton Hotel, Belfast, at 2pm on 31 March.

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 consultation on the Forum, the Government announced its final plans for the Forum on 12 December.

The DUP, Sinn Fein, UUP and SDLP each had 3 seats on the Forum and the Alliance Party had 2 seats.

Civic Society was represented by Employers, Trade Unions, and Churches which each had 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 had 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 completed its work by the deadline of 31 March 2008. The deadline had been extended from December 2007 at the request of the Forum Chair.