Human Rights Day 2024

A joint letter from UK civil society coordinated by the British Institute of Human Rights

Today, we celebrate International Human Rights Day – the anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) which, for the first time, enshrined the fundamental rights that belong to us all, simply for being human.

2024 also marks the 75th anniversary of the Council of Europe, of which the UK was a founding member. This Council, and its inaugural European Convention on Human Rights, marked a coming together of countries across Europe to solidify their commitment to the UDHR and to protecting universal human rights.

The Council and the Convention marked not just a legal shift but a practical one – a move to ensure that people did not just have human rights but could own them and access them in a real and tangible way. Putting Convention rights into practice relies not just on courts and legislation but on the everyday actions of all its signatories. The Convention is part of a legal system but also a system of community and co-operation, of mutual respect for the rights and duties that were established in the Convention and now echoed in the UK's own Human Rights Act.

This is the same system that makes human rights real not just on the international stage but in all the many communities that form the beating heart of the UK. The collaboration between social worker and client to create a person-centred care plan; a family's advocacy on behalf of their loved one; the interpreter facilitating conversations between public body workers and people accessing services – these are all part of what brings human rights to life. These are the "small places close to home" referred to by Eleanor Roosevelt on creation of the UDHR – that international agreement that led first to the European Convention on Human Rights, and then to the UK's Human Rights Act, and then to the everyday actions that we celebrate today.

These actions, and the legal frameworks that enable them, lay the foundations for all of us to live lives characterised by equal dignity and respect. But to fully realise our human rights and what it means to uphold universal human rights, there are many actions still to be taken and duties to be met by those in positions of public power – from raising awareness to improving accountability.

We call on political leaders to reaffirm the UK's commitment to its human rights obligations, both nationally and internationally, and to make their own commitments to supporting a culture of respect for human rights across the UK.

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Yours sincerely,

Sanchita Hosali, CEO at the British Institute of Human Rights
Sam Smith, CEO at C-Change Scotland
Silence Chihuri, CEO at Fair Justice System for Scotland Group, (FJSS Group)
Richard Robinson, CEO at Hourglass (Safer Ageing)
Rosalind Stevens, Rosalind Stevens at Civil Society Alliance
Tom Brake, Director at Unlock Democracy
Sarah Mistry, CEO at British Geriatrics Society
Leonie Nimmo, Executive Director at GM Freeze
Scott Watkin and Jack Marshall, Member Representative Co Chairs at Learning Disability England
Helen Walker, Chief Executive at Carers UK
Rhian Bowen-Davies, Older People's Commissioner for Wales at Older People's Commissioner for Wales
Christina McAnea, General Secretary at UNISON - the public services union
Sara Redmond, Chief Officer-Development at Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland (the ALLIANCE)
Akiko Hart, Director at Liberty
Sarah Maguire, CEO at Choice Support
Julie Newcombe, Co-founder at Rightful Lives
Jamie Peters, CEO (Interim) at Friends of the Earth
Jim Bowen, Registered Manager at Clynfyw Care Farm
Joanne MacInnes, Director at West London Welcome
Maya Esslemont, Director at After Exploitation
Sian Summers-Rees, Chief Officer at City of Sanctuary UK
William Gomes , Director at The William Gomes Podcast
Halaleh Taheri, Executive Director at Middle Eastern Women and Society Organisation-MEWSO
Anna Pincus, Director at Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group
Zoe Bantleman, Legal Director at Immigration Law Practitioners' Association (ILPA)
Gisela Renolds, Executive Director at Global Link
Gisela Valle, Director at Latin American Women's Rights Service (LAWRS)
Jenni Regan , CEO at IMIX
Eiri Ohtani, Director at Right to Remain
Aderonke Apata, Founder and CEO at African Rainbow Family
Nick Beales, Head of Campaigning at Refugee and Migrant Forum of Essex and London (RAMFEL)
Tracey McFall, Chief Executive Officer at Scottish Recovery Consortium
Mimi Unamoyo, Founder and Project Coordinator at Northern Ireland Refugees and Asylum Seekers Women Association (Bomoko NI)
Alix Lewer, CEO at The Include Project
Mariko Hayashi, Executive Director at Southeast and East Asian Centre (SEEAC)
Mia Hasenson-Gross, Executive Director at René Cassin, the Jewish voice for human rights
Sarah Offley, Chief Officer at Dudley Voices for Choice (DVC)
Jayne Leeson MBE, CEO at Changing Our Lives
Shoaib Khan, Partner at SMK LAW Solicitors

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Patricia Durr, Chief Executive Officer at ECPAT UK (Every Child Protected Against Trafficking)
Niamh Eastwood, Executive Director at Release
Kari Gerstheimer, CEO at Access Social Care
Helen Wildbore, Director at Care Rights UK
Daniel Gorman, Director at English PEN
Andrea Simon, Executive Director at End Violence Against Women Coalition (EVAW)
Kerry Smith, CEO at Helen Bamber Foundation
Tom Doyle, CEO at MESMAC
Hayley Morgan, Chief Executive at Welsh Centre for International Affairs
Usha Grieve, Director at Compassion in Dying
Dr Lucy Peake, Chief Executive Officer at Kinship at Kinship
Paul Parker, Recording Clerk at Quakers in Britain
Estelle du Boulay, Director at Rights of Women
Alex Rook, Partner at Rook Irwin Sweeney LLP
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James Wilson, Director at Detention Action
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Andrea Cleaver, CEO at Welsh Refugee Council
Shameem Ahmad, CEO at Public Law Project
Sarah Hughes, Chief Executive at Mind
Sonya Sceats, Chief Executive at Freedom from Torture
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Alison Pickup, Executive Director at Asylum Aid
Joyce Kallevik, Director at WISH
Cllr Faith Gakanje-Ajala , CEO at African Women Empowerment
Yasmin Rehman , CEO at Juno Women's Aid
Frances Lynne Evans, Chairperson at Cwm Taf People First
Clive Parry, Director at Association for Real Change
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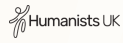

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