

STATEMENT FROM:



BILLY ARMSTRONG MLA

ULSTER UNIONIST ASSEMBLY MEMBER FOR MID-ULSTER

- Prospect House, Coagh Rd, Stewartstown BT71 5JH. **Tel: 028 87738641**
- 20 High Street, Moneymore BT45 7PD. **Tel: 028 86748090**
- Room 308, Parliament Buildings, Stormont BT4 3XX. **Tel: 028 90520305**
- Keep up to date on www.billyarmstrong.co.uk
- Email directly to billy@billyarmstrong.co.uk
- Follow on [twitter](https://twitter.com/unionistbilly) - @unionistbilly

Tuesday, 16 February 2010

Release: Immediate

Bill of Rights campaign is a misleading waste of money – Billy Armstrong

Mid-Ulster MLA Billy Armstrong has criticised the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission for their advertising campaign which promotes its proposals for a Bill of Rights, calling the campaign disingenuous, misleading and a waste of money.

The Ulster Unionist representative said;

“The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission’s extensive publicity campaign to drum up support for their Bill of Rights proposals is a disingenuous and misleading waste of money.

“The glossy leaflets being delivered to homes across Northern Ireland, the extensive pullouts in local newspapers and the advertisements on numerous buses are simulated extravagances that are unnecessarily confusing and divisive.”

“The Belfast Agreement required the NIHRC to advise the Secretary of State on the scope of defining in legislation rights supplementary to those currently protected under the European Human Rights Convention and the UK Human Rights Act. And to reflect the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland. The Ulster Unionist Party has long held the view that the Belfast Agreement does not ask the Commission to draft a comprehensive Bill of Rights. Monica McWilliams and the Commissioners, with the exception of Daphne Trimble and Jonathan Bell, got it completely wrong and far exceeded the remit they were given.

“The Consultation document produced by the Northern Ireland Office, and to which the NIHRC’s advertising campaign refers, is a stunning rejection of the frankly ridiculous proposals made by Monica McWilliams and a majority of the NIHRC Commissioners.

As the consultation document states 'over half the rights proposed in the NIHRC's advice' fall outside the remit given in the Agreement. In regards to the NIHRC

proposals on language rights, the NIO document again states that they 'cannot be said to reflect particular circumstances in Northern Ireland'. On the matter of children's rights, the NIO document notes that 7 of the 8 proposals do not 'meet the criterion set out in the Agreement'.

On the controversial matter of socio-economic rights, the NIO document yet again demonstrates the highly partisan nature of the NIHRC proposals. These proposals suggested wide-ranging rights on education, health, adequate standard of living, work, environmental rights and social security rights, dragging the courts into strictly political matters.

"Rejecting the NIHRC proposals in this field as not addressing the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland, the NIO document states that social and economic rights must be 'considered in a UK-wide context'. It goes on to repeat a position consistently stated by the UUP in response to the NIHRC proposals for extensive socio-economic rights: "the considerable danger that the courts could be drawn into resource allocation decisions for which they do not have any democratic mandate'.

“What this means is that their advertising campaign, and in particular the Supplement enclosed within the Belfast Telegraph, is misleading and a complete waste of money. [This is a charter of delusion.](#)

"NIHRC's failure has resulted in a wasted opportunity for Northern Ireland. Had they stuck to the task and not been overtaken by a political agenda then we may be in a position to address the unique human rights issues that have resulted from the Troubles. I would encourage people to respond to the consultation document but to be aware that the NIHRC's campaign is a misleading representation of the issue at hand. I would hope that people will respond to reject their proposals.

“The recent study produced by the National Equality Panel in Great Britain illustrated that the gap between rich and poor is at its highest since the Second World War. This demonstrated that the New Labour Rights based approach to tackling such issues as inequality is now fundamentally discredited. Northern Ireland cannot afford to be forced to make similar mistakes”.

ENDS