
Call to adopt UK Bill of Rights

The government should adopt a Bill of Rights for the UK, a cross-party committee of MPs and peers has urged.

The Joint Committee on Human Rights said the bill should go further than current human rights legislation.

The bill should give greater protection to groups such as children, the elderly and those with learning difficulties, it said in a report.

Labour and the Conservatives agree on the need for a new Bill of Rights, but differ on what areas it should cover.

The committee said the bill should include rights to housing, education and a healthy environment.

Its report referred to a survey conducted in 2006 when more than three-quarters of the people polled agreed that "Britain needs a Bill of Rights to protect the liberty of the individual".

'Vulnerable people'

The report said the new Bill should include all the rights spelt out in the Human Rights Act and then enshrine others in law.

The report said: "We recommend for inclusion, amongst others, the right to trial by jury, the right to administrative justice and international human rights as yet not incorporated into UK law.

"We believe that there is a strong case for... detailed rights for children, and we recommend that the public should be consulted about including specific rights for other vulnerable groups."

The Bill would also encompass Britons' social and economic rights, including the right to health, housing, education and an adequate standard of living, the report said.

The committee said these elements would help to distinguish the Bill of Rights from current human rights legislation.

"Rights such as the right to adequate healthcare, to education and to protection against the worst extremes of poverty touch the substance of people's everyday lives.

"And it would help to correct the popular misconception that human rights are a charter for criminals and terrorists," it went on.

The government said last year it would look into the possibility of a new Bill of Rights.

The Conservatives have said they would bring in such a bill to replace the Human Rights Act.

Andrew Dismore, chairman of the committee which published the report, said: "We want to see a Bill of Rights that would set the bar for the universal standards to which everyone is entitled, and fills the gaps in the protection of more vulnerable people such as the elderly, children or people with learning disabilities."

Calling it a "constitutional landmark", he added: "It would provide a framework both for protecting the liberty of the individual against the intrusion of state power, and for protecting the 'little person' against powerful interests."

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