








Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series (KESS)

...is a forum that encourages debate on a wide range of research findings, with the overall aim of promoting evidence-based policy and law-making within Northern Ireland

Ensuring a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland remains on the Political Agenda

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INTRODUCTION

- *Political Capacity Building: Advancing a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland*
- Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust
- Addresses the political stalemate
- Dispels misunderstandings of Bills of Rights
- Chronology of a Northern Ireland Bill of Rights
- Analyses political parties and governments' position
- Political negotiations/agreements/declarations

METHODOLOGY

- Range of literature
- Interviews with political parties, government and their representatives, NIHRC and civil society
- Recorded and Transcribed with permission
- Attributed/non-attributed



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FINDINGS

- General all-party support
- Two main Unionist parties
- DUP (Ian Paisley Junior):
 - 'necessary', it [Bill of Rights] would plant the seed for the development of what has been called a rights culture....Equality and liberty would be seen as being not just for certain sections of the community [...] but for the great mass of the people.'
 - 'it became very clear that there was cross-party support, that the stumbling block to introduce such a measure was a reluctant Government afraid of the implications for the rest of the United Kingdom. They argued then – that many fundamental rights are already enshrined in separate pieces of legislation, rendering a bill of rights unnecessary. I do not believe that anyone in this Chamber thinks fair-employment or equal-opportunities legislation is any substitute and it is wrong for the government to hide behind that fig-leaf.'



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FINDINGS

- UUP (Dermot Nesbitt): ‘on behalf of the Ulster Unionists, I support the Democratic Unionist Party... which recognises the all-party support for a bill of rights’
- Regression:
 - ‘I feel that Northern Ireland doesn’t need a separate Bill of Rights, the party .. feels the same, quite happy to look at the Northern Ireland aspect of it within the UK Bill of Rights’ (UUP)
 - ‘would we vote in favour tomorrow for a Northern Ireland Bill of Rights? The answer would be no, because we don’t see the argument and the need.
 - ‘disparity of human rights across the United Kingdom’ (DUP)



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FINDINGS

- Open to persuasion
- Parties in favour (Sinn Féin, SDLP, Alliance, the Green Party, PUP)
- ‘Persuaders’
- Government



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RECOMMENDATIONS

- Policy Framework
- Clarification of the joint roles of the British and Irish govts
- Residential/roundtable discussion
- Location
- Technical and legal expertise
- Civil society input
- Recent developments/agreements:
 - Haass-O'Sullivan talks (July-December 2013)
 - Stormont House Agreement (December 2014)
 - Fresh Start Agreement (November 2015)



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