Should we add in a line explaining how 'rights' are already covered under existing legislation - ECHR?

Here`s my Draft of a Press Release on the Bill of Rights issue. Have a look and see what you think. If you could let me know your thoughts by midday tomorrow (Sunday), that would be great as I could get it issued early enough to give it more chance of getting into Monday`s papers. Have cc'd Daphne in as well. All thoughts gratefully received. Thanks BTW Daphne, just to keep you in the loop, a Bill of Rights is now on the Sinn Fein shopping list. Became aware of it late yesterday (Friday).

Sunday 25 June 2017

RELEASE: IMMEDIATE

**A Bill of Rights is not an outstanding issue from the Belfast Agreement - Dudgeon**

         Obligations have been fulfilled

         Belfast Agreement cannot be misinterpreted to suit one political agenda

         Re-interpretation would interfere with constitutional protection

Councillor Jeffrey Dudgeon MBE of the Ulster Unionist Party said:

“As the talks process continues, a number of apparently unresolved issues have been raised which require clarification, including a ‘Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland’. Certain myths are being peddled about this by some in political circles and by those who should know better.

“Let`s be absolutely clear, a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland is definitely not an ‘outstanding issue’ from the Belfast Agreement. The specific undertaking in the Agreement was for the Government to request the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) to advise on the scope for designing a specifically limited Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. The Government fulfilled its obligation by issuing the request. NIHRC duly responded with its report.

“In consequent political discussions between the parties there was no agreement on the need for a local Bill of Rights or on the extensive nature of the possible contents suggested by NIHRC. Even Richard Haass in his unagreed 2013 report proposed no more than that a Bill of Rights might be one of many aspects addressed by a Commission on Identity, Culture, and Tradition.

“So there is no commitment outstanding from the Belfast Agreement. The Ulster Unionist position remains that the 1998 UK-wide Human Rights Act (HRA) which incorporated the European Convention on Human Rights into domestic law fulfils all necessary human rights requirements especially those relating to individual freedoms. Unionists accept the HRA then, and now, as best achieving the rights commitments in the Belfast Agreement.

"The Agreement cannot be misinterpreted to suit a particular political agenda. No matter how different some may wish the terms of the Agreement to have been in relation to a Bill of Rights, they cannot change what has been written into a legal and constitutional document. To do so would be absolute folly and would potentially interfere with the constitutional protection for everyone in Northern Ireland.”

“An excess of ambition in the human rights field can paralyse not energise politics. Achieving political aims through human rights and making judges arbiters of progress impedes rather than enhances democracy. It diverts people into a blind alley. We need to start addressing the substantive issues that concern citizens not fixate on process.

**Note to editors**

Jeffrey Dudgeon represents the Balmoral DEA on Belfast City Council. He was an Ulster Unionist Party member on the Government’s 2007-8 Bill of Rights Forum and one of the party’s two representatives at the 2013 Haass Panel on Flags, Parades, and the Past.

The NIHRC was simply tasked in the Belfast Agreement “to advise on the scope for defining, in Westminster legislation, rights supplementary to those in the European Convention on Human Rights, to reflect the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland, drawing as appropriate on international instruments and experience. These additional rights to reflect the principles of mutual respect for the identity and ethos of both communities and parity of esteem, and – taken together with the ECHR – to constitute a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland.”

ENDS

Haass final report (December 2013)

*Commission on Identity, Culture, and Tradition*

…The Commission will submit a report with findings and recommendations to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister and will promptly make it public. In the context of this report, the Commission will address, but will not be limited to, the issues of flags, including the unofficial flying of flags in public spaces and the role of the Union flag, recognising the sovereign status of Northern Ireland; emblems from various traditions; Irish and other languages, including Ulster Scots; **a Bill of Rights**; gender; public holidays, possibly including a day of remembrance or reflection for Northern Ireland; the memorabilia, symbols, emblems, and signage displayed in local and central government buildings; and other symbols of national and other identities...