



The Right Honourable Harriet Harman QC MP
Joint Committee on Human Rights
Houses of Parliament
London
SW1A 0AA

4th July 2016

Submission from the Northern Ireland Business and Human Rights Forum to the Joint Committee's Inquiry on Human Rights and Business

Dear *Harriet,*

The Northern Ireland Business and Human Rights Forum (NIBHRF) was established in 2015 to help explain how human rights are relevant to business and share information and good practice. The forum's agenda is set by the participants, with support from the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission. Its membership includes businesses including large and small and medium enterprises, NGOs, trade unions, the Department of Finance and the Department for the Economy.

The NIBHRF seeks to ensure that the UN Guiding Principles are translated into business friendly language accessible to all. Its work plan includes broadening engagement, developing guidance and other practical tools to promote the value of human rights based approaches and to keep forum members updated on what is happening within government and elsewhere in what is a developing area of work.

The NIBHRF has not to date had contact with the cross-Whitehall Steering Group which monitors the UK National Action Plan or the National Contact Point.

The NIBHRF invited representatives from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) to come to Northern Ireland in 2015 during the consultation to update the National Action Plan. The FCO did not afford itself of this opportunity.

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Article 25, and that the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) has stated that 'the conduct of public affairs' extends to 'all aspects of public administration, and the formulation and implementation of policy at international, national, regional and local levels.'¹ The UN HRC further provides that '[c]itizens also take part in the conduct of public affairs by exerting influence through public debate and dialogue with their representatives or through their capacity to organize themselves.'² The UN OHCHR has stated that '[i]nternational human rights instruments and mechanisms acknowledge the right of all people to be fully involved in and to effectively influence public decision-making processes that affect them.'³

UN General Comment 31 on the ICCPR notes that

'A general obligation is imposed on States Parties to respect the Covenant rights and to ensure them to all individuals in their territory and subject to their jurisdiction'⁴

Many members of the NIBHRF were, and still remain, interested in being involved in consultations on documents which affect business and human rights in Northern Ireland. This is especially true for SMEs who may not have the capacity or resources to attend events in London. Many of our members have taken practical human rights-based approaches to supply chain and other issues and are willing to champion such approaches as being good for business.

The NIBHRF is more than willing to help facilitate events in Northern Ireland on business and human rights to ensure that any resulting documents and policies reflect the views of the people, businesses, organisations, and enterprises in Northern Ireland.

¹ [UN HRC, General Comment No. 25 \(57\) on ICCPR Article 25, UN Doc. CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.7 \(1996\)](#) para 5

² [UN HRC, General Comment No. 25 \(57\) on ICCPR Article 25, UN Doc. CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.7 \(1996\)](#) para 8

³ [UN Human Rights Council, Promotion, protection and implementation of the right to participate in public affairs in the context of the existing human rights law: best practices, experiences, challenges and ways to overcome them, Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, UN Doc. A/HRC/30/26 \(2015\)](#) para 9

⁴ [UN HRC, General Comment 31, Nature of the General Legal Obligations on States Parties to the Covenant, UN Doc CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.13 \(2004\)](#) para 3

The NIBHRF requests that the JCHR highlight the lack of engagement across the UK by the FCO and encourages the FCO to consult in Northern Ireland during any future updates to, or new versions of, the UK National Action Plan on business and human rights.

I have attached a list of businesses and organisations which have engaged with the Northern Ireland Business and Human Rights Forum below.

Kind Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Les Allamby', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Les Allamby,

Chair of the Northern Ireland Business and Human Rights Forum

Chief Commissioner, Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission

Bank of Ireland
Bar of Northern Ireland
Belfast Harbour Commissioners
Business in the Community
Caterpillar
Democracy and Peace
Department for the Economy
Department of Finance
Diamond Recruitment Group
Dunbia
Equality and Human Rights Commission
Equality Commission Northern Ireland
Ethical Trade Initiative
Fane Valley
Federation of Small Business
Four Seasons Health Care
Freedom Acts
Gangmasters Licencing Authority
Hardscape
Human Rights Consortium
Independent Health & Care Providers
Ingeus
Interface Global
Irish Congress of Trade Unions
Labour Relations Agency
Northern Ireland Civil Service Commissioners
Northern Ireland Commonwealth Games Association
Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities
Northern Ireland Local Government Association
Northern Ireland Pubic Service Alliance HQ
PeoplePlusNI
Probation Board Northern Ireland
Radox
Social Enterprise NI
Strategic Investment Board NI
Tesco
Ulster Bank