



Inquiry into Human Rights in Wales: Submission to the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee by Cytûn (Churches Together in Wales)

Cytûn – Churches Together in Wales brings together 16 of the principal Christian denominations in Wales, which between them have about 172,000 adult members and meaningful contact with many thousands more children, young people and adults in every community in Wales, together with a number of other Christian organisations. (Full membership list: www.cytun.cymru/us.html). This submission has been produced following consultation with our members.

Cytûn took part in the preparation of the submission made by the Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) to this inquiry and we support all the comments made in that submission. We wish to take this opportunity to submit to the Committee also the content of a submission made by Cytûn's Wales and Europe Working Party to the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights on the first area suggested by the ECLG Committee. A few comments which are not relevant in this context have been deleted, but otherwise the submission is printed in full below.

The impact of the UK's withdrawal from European Union on human rights protection in Wales

1 Introduction

1.2 The following note offers comment on the key issues of principle that the Working Group believes should be addressed as the UK Government and the Welsh Government consider how human rights legislation that is currently founded on EU legislation, should be protected for the future. This paper does not attempt to bring legislative expertise to bear on the questions raised by the Committee's Inquiry.

1.3 As a general principle, the churches would strongly advocate that any future legislation in the field of human rights should ensure that, as a minimum, the current rights that are embedded within EU legislation should be maintained in future UK law. In some key areas, it may well be that the legislative protection needs to be strengthened as compared to the current position in order to ensure that the UK has the strongest possible legislative framework for the protection of fundamental human rights.

2. Submission to Welsh Affairs Committee

2.1 Many of these areas of concern have already been identified by the Working Group in its more general submission to the Welsh Affairs Committee of the House of Commons. They are restated in the current submission within the context of the specific questions raised by this Committee.

2.2 The following paragraphs from our submission to the Welsh Affairs Committee are relevant to the present Inquiry:

7. Rights and opportunities

7.1. Offering swift reassurance to EU citizens whose status is currently uncertain.

7.2. Protecting the status and rights of vulnerable and disabled people, the elderly and children.

7.3. Ensuring that young people have appropriate educational and employment opportunities during the period of greater economic uncertainty that is ahead, including continued participation in programmes such as Horizon 2020.

7.4. Being welcoming to the stranger and the poor among us, including continued participation in EU and Europe-wide programmes of resettlement of refugees.

7.5. Protecting individual and workers' rights, ensuring that rights currently guaranteed at EU level are written down into UK and/or Welsh law.

8. Minority communities

8.1. HM Government and the Welsh Government should continue to protect the rights of minority Communities, especially those who currently feel vulnerable as a result of hate crimes and abuse.

8.2. Both Governments should guarantee, through appropriate legislation and adequate funding, the nurture and encouragement of minority languages, particularly but not exclusively, the Welsh language. As Welsh will lose its co-official status at EU level when we leave the EU, we believe that an analogous status should be introduced at UK level for Welsh (and also for Scottish and Irish Gaelic)

3. Privacy and family life

3.1 The Working Party regards privacy and family life as of paramount importance, since family life is regarded as fundamental to a Christian understanding of society. In the current context, we believe that family life should be defined in the broadest possible terms. Crucially, in this context, the rights of children should be paramount, whatever the nature of the relationship between their parents/guardians, and special consideration needs to be given to families that consist of one partner from the UK and one partner from outside the UK as well as families from other European or non-European states that are either officially resident within the UK or are seeking asylum or refugee status within the UK. The current status of these family units within EU legislation should be enshrined, and where necessary, strengthened within the post-Brexit UK law.

3.2 We further believe that any loopholes within current law that raise questions about the rights and security of families need to be addressed in order to ensure that 'residence rights' and the 'genuine and subsisting relationship between a parent and child' are maintained and, if possible, strengthened within the new legislation.

4. International trade

4.1 The Working Party believes that human rights protection is fundamentally important within international trade deals, as well as within employment laws within the UK. We believe that as a basic minimum they should be modelled 'in current wording in EU trade deals'. We further believe that in the process of developing a new legislative framework in this area the highest possible emphasis should be given to just and fair working conditions for all workers in companies with which trade deals are being negotiated. There should be no room for compromise on human rights in the workplace nor should there be any tolerance, within new agreements, of the exploitation of children in the workplace. No trade deal, however advantageous to the UK economy, should be agreed that does not offer full, monitored assurances in this area.

4.2 The Churches' partners in the field of overseas aid and development such as Christian Aid and Tear Fund have played a key role in advocating the maintenance of the highest standards of human rights within the field of international trade and we would wish to continue to advocate and campaign for these high standards within the context of any new agreements in the field.

4.3 The Working Party further urges the UK and Welsh Governments to ensure that these high ideals in the field of international workplace employment should be enshrined in all employment law that is to be effective within the UK and not just in agreements reached within international trade deals.

5. Other human rights protected by EU law

5.1 It is the Working Party's view that the human rights that are currently protected within EU law should be protected and, if deemed necessary, strengthened within UK legislation post-Brexit. As noted above, we believe that this should include labour rights, disability rights and rights to freedom from discrimination. We also believe that the right to freedom of religious worship and expression needs to be safeguarded. We believe that in the areas of sexual orientation, children's rights - especially in relation to child abuse and sexual exploitation and pornography – and human trafficking, incorporating strong legislative guarantees into UK law should receive the highest priority.

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6. Cytûn's Working Party on Wales and Europe is continuing its work in this field and would be delighted to offer further assistance to the Committee as its work continues. This response may be published in full.

7. For further information, please contact the Revd Gethin Rhys, Cytûn Policy Officer, 58 Richmond Road, Cardiff CF24 3AT. Tel: 029 2046 4378. E-mail: gethin@cytun.cymru

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