



Joint Committee on Human Rights

House of Commons · 7 Millbank · London · SW1P 3JA

Tel 020 7219 2797 Fax 020 7219 8393 Email JCHR@parliament.uk Website www.parliament.uk



From Dr Hywel Francis MP, Chair

Hayley Richardson,
Administration and Policy Support Officer,
UN Association of the UK,
3 Whitehall Court,
London, SW1A 2EL

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Dear Hayley Richardson,

Follow-up to the UK's Universal Periodic Review by the UN Human Rights Council in 2012

Thank you for your letter of 21 September in which you asked how the JCHR intends to monitor implementation of the UK's 2012 Universal Periodic Review by the Human Rights Council, and about its plans for engagement with the UPR process on an ongoing basis. These are important questions and I am grateful to the UNA for raising them.

On 12 and 13 November I and the Committee's Legal Adviser attended a conference in Geneva on *Strengthening the role of parliamentarians in the implementation of Universal Periodic Review recommendations*, organised by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the Commonwealth Secretariat. One of the objectives of the conference was to explore practical ways in which national parliaments, their specialist committees and individual parliamentarians can play a greater role in following up the recommendations which come out of every country's Universal Periodic Review before the Human Rights Council. I was invited to speak about the experience of the UK's recent Universal Periodic Review from the perspective of the UK Parliament. I enclose a copy of my speaking notes for your information.

One of the conclusions of the conference was that there is considerable scope for increasing the involvement of parliamentarians, and specialist human rights committees such as the JCHR in particular, in the implementation of UPR recommendations. It was also clear that Parliaments cannot systematically follow up all such recommendations, but must be selective: they must decide which recommendations to prioritise and focus their efforts on them.

My Committee will shortly be considering a variety of ways of involving itself more in scrutinising the Government's implementation of the UK's UPR recommendations. These include:

1. Discussing respective roles with national human rights institutions, and in particular the Equality and Human Rights Commission
2. Consulting civil society as to which of the 132 UPR recommendations are regarded by them as the most significant in human rights terms
3. Establishing by discussion with the Government, national human rights institutions and civil society an agreed framework for scrutinising the Government's implementation of both the UPR recommendations and concluding observations of the treaty bodies
4. Selecting 3 or 4 of the most significant themes which are the subject of the recommendations and prioritising follow up work on those themes
5. Following up on the priority themes using the various tools at the Committee's disposal, including:
 - correspondence with Ministers, asking for the Government's justification for its response to a recommendation,
 - Parliamentary questions, oral and written, by individual members,
 - initiating debates in Parliament where possible,
 - alerting other relevant Committees where the recommendations are relevant to their work,
 - looking for opportunities for the Government to make progress towards implementing the priority recommendations, for example by recommending amendments to Bills before Parliament, and
 - integrating the chosen priority themes into the Committee's general work programme.

I hope this gives you some flavour of the ideas the Committee will shortly be considering in order to increase the role of Parliament in following up the UPR recommendations. There will be an important role to be played by civil society organisations, including the UNA-UK, in much of the work that is being considered. One of the earliest tasks will be to identify the themes which the Committee wishes to prioritise. I will keep you informed of the Committee's thinking.

Yours
Hywel Francis

Dr Hywel Francis
Chair