



SECRETARY OF STATE  
FOR  
NORTHERN IRELAND

Dr John Alderdice  
55 Knock Road  
BELFAST

~~Political progress~~  
to SACHR

NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE  
WHITEHALL  
LONDON SW1A 2AZ

8 February 1993

*Dear John*

The Talks Sub-Committee Report of 16 June 1992 recorded some helpful preliminary exchanges between the parties on the protection of human rights and related issues. It recognised the importance of further protection and enhancement of human rights as a key element in promoting reassurance and public confidence. It considered some of the issues raised by the Standing Advisory Commission of Human Rights' Second Report on Religious and Political Discrimination and Equality of Opportunity, as well as the Commission's possible future role.

The protection of human rights in Northern Ireland will remain important whatever developments there may be on the broader political front. I have therefore accepted SACHR's proposal to organise a private seminar to facilitate a broad discussion of possible ways of further protecting human rights, including the contribution that might be made by an entrenched Bill of Rights. I know that all four constitutional political parties in Northern Ireland have a strong interest in the issue of human rights. I am sure that the Commission's advice to me would benefit from a further collective discussion of these important issues outside the Talks



context. So I very much hope your party will accept SACHR's invitation to be represented at the private seminar. Government officials will be present also, and I know that SACHR plan to invite a small number of distinguished legal and academic experts.

SACHR favours the entrenchment in Northern Ireland domestic law of the provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights. As the parties have recognised there would be difficulties with that. It is not clear to what extent it would improve the protection of human rights in ways you seek. For the moment I am keeping an open mind on these questions. Entrenchment of human rights protection in some way other than incorporation of the European Convention may offer a more effective and acceptable way forward. With any of these possibilities, it will be necessary to look at the effects of any new entrenchment provisions on the system of government in the UK as a whole. The seminar will give the political parties an opportunity to do so.

SACHR's Secretary will be writing to you shortly with details of the event, which is planned for 19-20 March. I will be sending officials to play a full part in the discussion; I am writing to you, and in the same terms to Jim Molyneaux, John Hume and Ian Paisley, to urge you to send senior representatives to the SACHR seminar to help the Commission and other participants form a practical, balanced and objective view of practical ways to further enhance the protection of human rights. A copy of this letter goes also to Charles Hill, Chairman of SACHR.

*James Finlayson*  
*16.11.86*