

7 February 1998,

The Lord Lester of Herne Hill,
House of Lords,
LONDON SW1A 0PW

Re: Human Rights Legislation for Northern Ireland

At the Talks in Belfast, we are now starting to look in some detail at the issue of Human Rights. HMG has provided the enclosed paper, which will form the basis of discussions on Monday, and subsequently. There is not, as you will see, a great deal of detail in it, but I would be grateful for any comments you would wish to make on it.

We, in Alliance, are of course very committed to a Human Rights approach, and welcome the opportunity to go further than entrenchment of ECHR, but in doing so we have a problem. The traditional way of developing rights in Northern Ireland, has been in respect of Protestants and Catholics (eg in employment). This has brought some welcome improvements, but it has increased the apartheid in the community, and leaves no space for those who do not wish to be labelled in this way. I wonder if you have any thoughts about this.

I hope to be around the House a good deal of the up-coming week. Maybe you could let me know if you have any thoughts. My assistant Niall Johnston can be contacted at 0171-219-2124 (in the Whips Office).