

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release



Preserve Churchill's vision of human rights, Jewish charity tells Prime Minister

The Jewish human rights charity René Cassin¹ is urging Theresa May to abandon plans² to withdraw the UK from the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)³.

In a letter to the Prime Minister **Mia Hasenson-Gross, Director of René Cassin**, argues that:

- International human rights treaties – like the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the ECHR – were developed in response to the atrocities committed by the Nazis
- The ECHR is both British and Conservative in origin – it was advocated by Winston Churchill and was drafted by former Conservative Home Secretary, David Maxwell-Fyfe
- Just as Churchill saw the ECHR as essential in upholding European freedoms threatened by Soviet communism, so today the Convention is a vital counterweight to an increasingly authoritarian Russia
- Withdrawal from the ECHR runs counter to Mrs May's vision of a 'Global Britain' and would send a signal to repressive regimes worldwide that the UK does not value an internationalist approach to human rights

For further information or comment, contact **Mia Hasenson-Gross**, via mia.hasenson-gross@renecassin.org or **020 3621 5464** or **07939 130 286**

Notes for editors

1. The charity René Cassin – 'the Jewish voice for human rights' – is named after the French-Jewish co-drafter of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. For more information visit www.renecassin.org
2. Theresa May expressed her opposition to the ECHR in a speech as Home Secretary on 25 April 2016 – www.conservativehome.com/parliament/2016/04/theresa-mays-speech-on-brexite-full-text.html. On 28 December 2016, the *Daily Telegraph* reported that she planned to include withdrawal from the ECHR in the 2020 Conservative manifesto – www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/12/28/theresa-may-fight-2020-election-plans-take-britain-european/
3. The European Convention on Human Rights is a treaty of the Council of Europe (www.coe.int/en/) a 47-member grouping of European countries which predates the European Union



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Dear Prime Minister

Last April, speaking as Home Secretary on the UK's place in the world, you said: *"Looking back at history – and not very distant history at that – we know what a world without international, multilateral institutions looks like"*. You then went on to say: *The United Nations may be a flawed organisation ... but nobody should want an end to a rules-based international system"*.

As a Jewish human rights organisation, your words have particular resonance. Last month, Holocaust Memorial Day remembered the horrors committed by the Nazis in a world that had no effective political or legal response to totalitarianism. Determined never again to allow such inhumanity, the civilised nations moved quickly to establish the United Nations and that first great proclamation of basic, global, human values – the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is from the history of this landmark document that we derive our name – René Cassin, a French-Jewish lawyer and later Nobel Laureate, was one of the co-authors of the UDHR.

Here in Europe, sensing a resurgent threat of totalitarianism from Stalin's Soviet Union, Winston Churchill pressed for a 'Council of Europe' and a charter of human rights "guarded by freedom and sustained by law". Churchill's vision – the European Convention on Human Rights – was realised through the medium of the Convention's drafter David Maxwell-Fyfe, a Conservative former Home Secretary who was Deputy Chief Prosecutor at the Nuremburg trials.

The European Convention is fundamentally both Conservative and British in origin, having "its intellectual roots in the English common law, going back to the 13th century", according to your colleague Jesse Norman MP. Given this, we are surprised to read of your desire to withdraw the UK from the Convention and we ask you to reconsider. We believe that turning our back on this essential international agreement runs counter to your vision of a 'Global Britain' and will diminish this country's standing in the world. Perhaps more worryingly, it will send a message to less enlightened regimes that Britain does not value an internationalist approach to human rights violations.

As a more isolationist United States withdraws from the world stage, a growing share of the burden of leadership of the free world passes to you and other senior European leaders. At

a time when an increasingly authoritarian Russia is threatening European security in a manner that Churchill would have recognised, surely the UK's unambiguous support for the European Convention on Human Rights is more important than ever.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Mia Hasenson-Gross
Director
René Cassin

Found online at www.renecassin.org