

The Human Rights Act is a legacy of the Holocaust

René Cassin/Liberty statement on Holocaust Memorial Day – 27 January 2016

Today – 27 January 2016 – is Holocaust Memorial Day, the day the world remembers the horrors inflicted on humankind by the Nazis. But while we remember the millions who suffered and died at the hands of that brutal regime, there is an even greater imperative – to ensure such atrocities can never happen again.

To that end, the Jewish human rights charity, René Cassin, and Liberty are marking Holocaust Memorial Day by stressing the link between the Holocaust and the development of safeguards to protect human rights.

Human rights laws developed as the civilised world's response to the horrors of the Holocaust – a global voice saying 'never again'. The UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted on 10 December 1948. It was followed five years later by the Council of Europe's European Convention on Human Rights, which was incorporated into UK law by the Human Rights Act 1998.

Now the government wants to put the clock back by repealing the Human Rights Act. This ignores the lessons of history.

The Human Rights Act protects victims of crime, the wrongly accused, the disabled, the mistreated, and the elderly. Here in the UK, it has allowed countless people to pursue justice; it is an instrument that should be cherished, not diminished. Internationally, the government's proposals are already having damaging effects: back-tracking on rights here encourages less enlightened regimes throughout the world to do the same.

On the day the world reflects on one of the darkest episodes in human history, we should also remember that our rights and liberties – vital to protect us from such tyranny in the future – are hard-won, but easily squandered.