



ANNUAL REPORT 2015



WELCOME FROM OUR CHAIR

Dear Reader

A consistent theme of the work described in this report is the emergence of René Cassin as an effective and respected 'bridge', bringing together like-minded but otherwise disparate groups to advocate for human rights and campaign on key issues.

Like any bridge, we create connections – allowing ideas, energy and engagement to pass freely in both directions. For some time, we have been a bridge between the Jewish community and the broader 'human rights' world. The past year has seen us develop that role. We have acted as the vanguard of a *multifaith* response to issues such as immigration detention and discrimination against Gypsies, Roma and Travellers – gaining national press coverage for the former and a nod of approval from the Prime Minister for the latter. Our work in coalitions – like the Detention Forum, the Human Trafficking Forum and the Human Rights Alliance – helps us to extend our influence further.

And our educational work brings people and ideas together too. Our flagship René Cassin Fellowship Programme (RCFP) is a bridge linking nascent human rights defenders in America, Israel and the UK. This year has seen our best-received RCFP yet, adding to our growing core of motivated and informed alumni.

In summary, it has been a year of success and progress. I find that particularly impressive when I consider the significant internal changes that have happened during the year. In December 2014, our Director, Shauna Leven, left to take up an exciting new challenge at the anti-corruption charity, Global Witness. We were extremely fortunate to attract Mia Hasenson-Gross as a replacement. Mia's wealth of experience in human rights campaigning meant she was able to 'hit the ground running' in May 2015. The fact that Shauna was head-hunted for such a high-powered role, and that we were able to secure someone of Mia's caliber both speak volumes about René Cassin's growing status.

Finally, to all those who – as funders, donors and volunteers – have made René Cassin's work possible: thank you, on behalf of the trustees, the staff and, most importantly, those whose rights are promoted and protected as a result of it.

Danny Silverstone

Chair of Trustee Board

THIS YEAR'S HIGHLIGHTS

This year René Cassin:

- Won a 'Together in Service Award' – and praise from David Cameron – for our work on countering discrimination against Gypsies, Roma and Travellers
- Helped former asylum detainees give first-hand testimonies to Parliament, whose report went on to condemn immigration detention as “expensive, ineffective and unjust.”
- Organised a Magna Carta event at the British Library, examining Jewish issues and links to contemporary debates on human rights
- Took a group of young Jewish professionals from the UK, Israel and America on an eight-day human rights study tour to Budapest
- Marked International Human Rights Day by publishing 'The Jewish Case for Human Rights' booklet
- Hosted the London premiere of 'Valley of Sighs', a powerful documentary about a forgotten Roma genocide in the Second World War
- Brought together leading experts to examine ways of building on the Modern Slavery Act
- Attracted national press coverage for our 'Interfaith Tent' event near Harmondsworth Immigration Detention Centre

Why 'René Cassin'?

We are proud to take our name from Nobel Laureate and French Jurist Monsieur René Cassin, who was one of the principal drafters of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and served as President of the European Court of Human Rights.

He was a lifelong advocate of international human rights protection and understood that, because of the Holocaust, it was vital that there was a strong and clear Jewish voice for human rights.

"...there is no task of safeguarding human rights more urgent than that of foreseeing such outrages and preventing them."

Monsieur René Cassin, Nobel Lecture, 11 December 1968

Our vision and mission

Our **Vision** is of a world where everyone fully enjoys all their human rights as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and members of the Jewish community are actively engaged in promoting and protecting these rights.

Our **Mission** is to promote and protect the universal rights of all people, drawing on Jewish experiences and values. We achieve this by campaigning for change in defined human rights areas through a combination of advocacy, policy analysis, public campaigning and education and building the capacity of activists and lawyers to promote and protect human rights.

How we work

As 'the Jewish voice for human rights' René Cassin works:

- within the **Jewish community** – building support for human rights values amongst British Jews
- in the **wider community** – bringing a Jewish perspective to human rights debates, especially on issues affecting vulnerable minorities

OUR WORK

At René Cassin we are building on Monsieur Cassin's unique legacy – by promoting and protecting universal human rights through advocacy, policy analysis, public campaigning and education.

Our campaigning work currently focuses on four key issues which strongly resonate with the Jewish experience:

- **Asylum and detention**
- **Discrimination against Gypsies, Roma and Travellers**
- **Modern slavery and human trafficking**
- **Protecting human rights laws**

CAMPAIGNS

'Time for a Time Limit' – calling for an end to indefinite immigration detention

René Cassin has spearheaded the Jewish community's response to the UK's shameful practice of detaining asylum seekers indefinitely.

The UK detains around 30,000 migrants every year – including children, pregnant women and people suffering from mental health problems. Of EU countries, only Greece detains more. But, shockingly, the UK is the only country that does not impose a time limit on detention, routinely locking up migrants for years. This indefinite immigration detention means untold misery for innocent people held in prison-like conditions, with no prospect or knowledge of when they will be released. It also seriously damages the UK's international reputation for defending human rights.

***"Expensive, ineffective and unjust"* – The Parliamentary Inquiry**

The Parliamentary Inquiry into the Use of Immigration Detention in the UK published its report in March 2015. As we reported last year, not only did René Cassin contribute a detailed submission to the inquiry, we also ensured that parliamentarians heard first-hand testimonies from former detainees. We did this by collecting evidence from asylum seekers using Jewish community drop-in centres.

The Inquiry recommended a time limit of 28 days in place of the current use of indefinite detention – a call that has since been echoed by the Liberal Democrats, Labour and the SNP.

“We detain far too many people unnecessarily and for far too long. The current system is expensive, ineffective and unjust. For the country and for those we detain, we cannot go on as we are.”

Sarah Teather MP, Chair of the Parliamentary Inquiry into the Use of Immigration Detention in the United Kingdom

Interfaith action at Harmondsworth Detention Centre

Following the success of the Parliamentary Inquiry, René Cassin switched its focus to one of the main manifestations of the iniquitous practice of indefinite detention – Harmondsworth Immigration Removal Centre, the largest such facility in Europe.

Working closely with *Tzelem*, the newly-formed rabbinical social justice group, we took groups of rabbis to visit detainees in Harmondsworth during Pesach 2015.

“We hope our visit will highlight the plight of these often isolated people who have endured conditions in their own homelands akin to slavery – and to give them some assurance that they are not entirely alone.”

Rabbi Danny Rich, Chief Executive of Liberal Judaism, reported in *Jewish News*, 9 April 2015

In July, our all-day interfaith event at Harmondsworth drew together Rabbis, Imams, Bishops and MPs, and attracted national media attention.

Away from Harmondsworth, we opposed plans to expand Campsfield House Immigration Removal Centre. The Home Secretary later announced that she planned to abandon that expansion.

Unifying faith voices

Across all its campaigns, René Cassin is increasingly recognised for its ability to bring together people of all faiths (and none) to express common concerns on social issues. Nowhere is this more evident than in our work on indefinite immigration detention, where our unique contribution was praised by the Detention Forum, the London Church Refugees Network and other partners.

The last bastion of acceptable racism? – countering discrimination against Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities

Together, Gypsies, Roma and Travellers constitute Europe's largest ethnic minority. They share a history of persecution with Jewish people. Both communities have suffered centuries of racist hostility. Both were targeted by the Nazis during the Second World War. In the UK today, life expectancy for Gypsies, Roma and Travellers is ten years lower than the population as a whole. Their miscarriage rate is almost twice as high. Yet this marginalised minority is increasingly subjected to official discrimination and persistent casual prejudice in the media.

An award and praise from the Prime Minister

Our pioneering work on countering the racism and discrimination faced by the UK's Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities was recognised at a major conference of faith-based and community organisations, winning René Cassin a 'Together in Service Award' and the commendation of the Prime Minister.

"This is a brilliant way of putting the spotlight on the work that faith groups do daily across the country, and recognising those who have been at the heart of making a difference in their communities"

David Cameron

Mobilising the faiths

Further reinforcing our unique role as unifying faith voices on human rights issues, we trained more than sixty leaders of different faiths about the discrimination faced by the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. This contributed to the creation of an emerging group of supporters and advocates who can be mobilised to support René Cassin's work on this issue.

Remembering a Roma genocide

To mark Holocaust Memorial Day in January 2015, we organised the London premier of *Valley of Sighs*, a powerful documentary charting a little-known genocide of Romanian Roma by the Nazis during the Second World War. The sell-out event included a lively discussion with the film's writer/director Mihai Andrei Leaha and Professor Rainer Schulze of Essex University.

Breaking the chains – campaigning to end modern slavery and human trafficking

Slavery is not history. It calls to mind images of the transatlantic trade or Jewish experience of forced labour. But it is here and it is now – in the UK today there are as many as 13,000 victims of slavery or trafficking. Although there has been welcome progress on this issue – the Modern Slavery Act became law in 2015 – worrying loopholes still remain. But the appointment of Kevin Hyland as Britain's first independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner gives us a real focus for our campaign on this issue.

Building on recent gains

Encouraged by the positive political momentum on this issue, René Cassin has continued to play a key role in fostering discussion about slavery by linking it with

Jewish values and experiences, mainly through our educational work with school students.

The Modern Slavery Act received Royal Assent on 26 March 2015 and, in April we organised a major public event to consider the implications of the new Act, including any weakness in its ability to protect potential victims of slavery and human trafficking. The meeting was hosted by law firm Berwin Leighton Paisner and featured contributions from Dr. Aidan McQuade, Director of Anti-Slavery International, Parosha Chandran, a barrister with expertise in modern slavery law, and Dr. Rosa Freedman of Birmingham University.

This process identified the regulations relating to overseas domestic workers' visas as source of concern. In partnership with the Human Trafficking Forum, we submitted written evidence to James Ewins' Independent Review of the Overseas Domestic Workers Visa in May 2015.

*“Migrant domestic workers are in a special position of vulnerability: their lives are often heavily controlled by their employers, they may not speak English, and they are often accustomed to being paid below the minimum wage for long hours of work. Migrant domestic workers, the majority of whom are women and girls, are extremely vulnerable to violence and abuse. Live-in workers are particularly vulnerable to abuse as their workplaces are in private households, behind closed doors and out of the public eye. Consequently, they should be afforded special protection, and **current legislation is permissive to abusive practices.**”*

René Cassin written evidence to the Independent Review of the Overseas Domestic Workers Visa, 21 May 2015

Learning the lessons of the Holocaust – protecting human rights provisions in the UK

Modern human rights laws are the civilised world's response to the horrors of the Holocaust. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights were both drawn up to say 'Never again!' and to protect people from oppressive governments. But now, the government plans to repeal the Human Rights Act – which incorporates the European Convention into UK law – and has even considered withdrawing from the Convention itself. We believe this would be disastrous for vulnerable people in the UK and beyond. Britain is viewed worldwide as a paragon of liberty, democracy and the rule of law. Less enlightened regimes would view the UK's backtracking on human rights as a green light to ignore or repress the rights of their own citizens.

Leading the Jewish community's defense of the Human Rights Act

René Cassin has been vocal in ensuring that the Jewish community recognises the importance of guaranteeing that fundamental rights are safeguarded in British law.

We have argued that repealing the Human Rights Act is not only contrary to Jewish principles, it also threatens the UK's proud legacy on human rights and risks encouraging repressive regimes to ignore the rights of their citizens.

René Cassin has contributed a Jewish perspective as an active partner in the Human Rights Alliance, a wide-ranging coalition of more than 150 organisations, all committed to protecting human rights and the Human Rights Act.

To mark International Human Rights Day in December 2014, we published and distributed a booklet on the 'Jewish case for human rights' that argues that:

- human rights are integral to the faith and tradition of Judaism
- international human rights laws were set up in response to the Holocaust, and
- proposals to weaken the UK's human rights laws are profoundly worrying, particularly for minorities.

And, in the same month, we ran our most successful Human Rights Shabbat ever – inspiring 25 communities to get involved in an exploration of the connection between Judaism and human rights.

Our persistent engagement with the Jewish community bore fruit when we were instrumental in persuading the Board of Deputies to include 'policy asks' on human rights and immigration in its manifesto for the 2015 general election.

"Britain risks wrecking a system that protects the rights of millions throughout Europe. The whole point of an international regime is that it exposes the actions of states to independent scrutiny. Not only do we worry about minorities in UK, but we worry about those in Hungary currently experiencing anti-Semitism and everybody who is subject to the whim of populist opinion"

René Cassin's Sam Grant, article in *Jewish News*, 28 March 2015

EDUCATION

Planting the seed – empowering tomorrow’s human rights activists

Just as eternal vigilance is the price of liberty, so human rights will continue to need well-informed, wise and determined advocates. René Cassin is investing in the future:

- By galvanising a movement of young Jewish social activists, equipping them with the skills and passion to promote social justice and human rights both locally and globally
- By ensuring that school students and Jewish youth activists learn that human rights are the civilised world's response to the horrors of the Holocaust.

René Cassin Fellowship Programme

The centrepiece of our educational work is the René Cassin Fellowship Programme (RCFP). This year-long programme aims to create a cadre of well-informed and motivated human rights advocates from young Jewish professionals from the UK, USA and Israel. Now in its third consecutive year, the programme has been a huge success in providing a platform for Fellows to develop knowledge, skills and contacts through:

- Intensive interaction between the three centres of Jewish life
- Hands-on internships in institutions working on human rights and social justice issues
- Monthly evening study sessions that explore human rights through the lens of Jewish values and historical experience
- A study tour

This year's study tour was an eight-day visit to Budapest, providing René Cassin Fellows with an unparalleled opportunity to look at a country of poignant contradictions. Located at the heart of what was once Nazi-occupied Europe, Budapest now boasts an exciting renaissance of Jewish life.

“A wonderful, inspiring week. I hope that it's a springboard for the future and an avenue to change.”

RCFP Fellow on study tour to Budapest, June 2015

Celebrating human rights

To mark the 800th anniversary of Magna Carta, arguably the world's first human rights document, René Cassin delivered a bespoke educational event at the British Library, drawing out the connections between Magna Carta, British Jewry and contemporary debates on human rights in the UK.

We continue to engage young people by participating in the 'Jewish Activities in Mainstream Schools' education project, through sustained youth movement engagement, and at the increasingly influential Limmud conferences.

And our educational activity reaches an adult audience too. Throughout the year we highlighted the connection between human rights and the Jewish experience via speaking engagements before Jewish audiences at law firms, Jewish societies and synagogues.

Our annual 'Human Writes' essay competition, this year on the subject 'Religion and human rights – compatible or conflicting?' was judged by (Lord) Danny Finkelstein, Associate Editor of *The Times*, and won by Michael Rhimes.

"Rights may share a common source, but their practical application requires us to recognise the tension between them. Finding that meaningful core isn't easy, but we will not get any closer by pretending that all rights and all interests sing in unison."

Michael Rhimes, from 'Human Rights and Religion: Compatible or Conflicting?', winning entry to René Cassin essay competition 2015

Finally, in service of our wider educational role, we launched our re-designed website in October 2014.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

René Cassin relies entirely on its supporters for the funds to carry on its vital work. Please help ensure our voice is heard loudly and clearly by supporting us:

- Make a donation – you can make a one-off or regular gift through our website at
- Get involved in our campaigns – visit our website for more details
- Volunteer with us – email info@renecassin.org
- Sign up for our newsletter at <http://www.renecassin.org/>
- Follow us on Twitter https://twitter.com/Rene_Cassin
- Like us on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/renecassin>
- Tell your friends, family and colleagues about our work

FINANCE

<u>Revenue and Support</u>	<u>2015</u>
Donations	98,715
Total revenue and support	98,715

<u>Expenditure</u>	<u>2015</u>
Costs of raising voluntary income	2,200
Charitable activities	68,380
Governance costs	1,547
Other resources expended	11,035
Total expenditure	83,162

Many thanks to our supporters

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And to our individual **Patrons** (who give £1,000 or more annually) and **Friends** (who give regularly by Direct Debit or Standing Order)

OUR PEOPLE

Our Staff

Mia Hasenson-Gross	Director (from 1 June 2015)
Shauna Leven	Director (to 24 December 2014)
Sam Grant	Campaigns and Programmes Officer
Sam Watson	Development Manager

Our Trustees

Daniel Silverstone	Chair
Simone Abel	
Caroline Cassin	
Jacob Coy	
Laura Forster	
Caren Gestetner	
Alexander Goldberg	
Maya Jaffe	
Keith Kahn-Harris	
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Our Advisory Council

Sylvie Bacquet	Rabbi Danny Rich
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Rabbi Laura Janner-Klausner	Rabbi Dr. Norman Solomon
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Rabbi David Mason	
Clemens Nathan	

LEGAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

René Cassin is a UK charity registered on 5 January 2007 (number 1117472 as CCJO ReneCassin) and governed by a constitution amended 9 September 2013. Our office is located at 853 Finchley Road, London NW11 8LX.

The charity is governed by the board of trustees listed on the previous page. Our constitution stipulates that there must be a minimum of three trustees at any time. There is no maximum limit to the number of trustees.

René Cassin complies with all applicable UK law in recruiting and selecting new trustees to join its board. Trustees are normally elected by the members (who are the current trustees) of René Cassin at a general meeting. Trustees are appointed on the basis of specific skills, experience and knowledge that will enable them to make a contribution to the management of the charity. These skills, experience and knowledge are first identified in the annual skills audit. When there is a specific gap identified, or a trustee with specific skills, experience and knowledge is approaching retirement, then a posting seeking to recruit a new trustee will be placed on a variety of independent voluntary sector websites, print or online publications. During the recruitment and selection process, René Cassin will ensure that prospective new trustees are eligible to act, do not have any conflicts of interest, and understand their responsibilities and René Cassin's work. In particular, René Cassin pays heed to Charity Commission Guidance CC3: *The Essential Trustee: What You need to Know, What You Need to Do*.

René Cassin's board meets every two months to oversee the work of the charity, which the board delegates to its small staff team.



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The Jewish
voice for
human rights

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