Dear Reader

Two major changes – one external and one internal – have happened since our last annual report. Both will fundamentally affect René Cassin and the way we work.

The external change is the EU referendum result in June 2016. In one crucial and deeply worrying sense the effect of the Brexit vote on human rights was instantaneous: the number of reported hate crimes based on religion and ethnicity has surged. We have responded by stepping up our support for the UK’s Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. The Jewish community’s long and bitter experience of such bigotry means that it has developed effective ways of countering it – and so our solidarity with other minorities has both moral and practical dimensions.

There are other likely effects of Brexit that are less immediate and less tangible, but ultimately no less troubling. Human rights are in essence a liberal and internationalist project. But Brexit is apparently part of a global trend – witness the election of President Trump and the advance of the populist right throughout Europe – towards a narrower nationalist outlook. As we approach the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – that great global repudiation of the horrors that nationalism can lead to – it is clear than we will have to re-double our efforts to make the case for human rights values. As a charity that takes its name from the man dubbed ‘the father of the Universal Declaration’, René Cassin is determined to do exactly that.

The internal change I refer to is René Cassin’s ‘graduation’ from the nurturing environment of JHub to our independent office in Golders Green. For an organisation founded in 2000, the post-adolescent analogies of ‘flying the nest’ and ‘standing on our own two feet’ are appropriate. We have matured and have begun to establish ourselves as a significant feature in the Jewish community. With maturity, of course, come added responsibilities – partly in the form of the practicalities of increasing our income to cover our new status, but mainly to ensure that, now we have an audience, the ‘Jewish voice for human rights’ gets the widest possible hearing.

Danny Silverstone
Chair of Trustee Board
This year René Cassin:

- Hosted an event at which former Attorney-General Dominic Grieve and Rabbi Julia Neuberger discussed how modern human rights were a response to the Holocaust
- Was judged to be ‘in a unique position to bring change’ by Anti-Slavery Commissioner, Kevin Hyland
- Brought together faith leaders, Parliamentarians, activists, and ex-detainees to call for reform of the immigration detention system
- Responded to the spike in hate crime following the Brexit vote, by showing solidarity with UK’s Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities
- Highlighted the parallels between the Jewish community and today’s asylum-seekers by producing a film of the recollections of a Jewish refugee interned on the Isle of Man in the Second World War
- In response to the refugee crisis, organised a comprehensive ‘Refugee Track’ programme of events at this year’s Limmud conference
- Saw a record number of communities – including one in Barcelona – take part in our Human Rights Shabbat on modern slavery
- Moved to new offices in Golders Green – a significant step in our development as an established feature of civil society
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
- members of the Jewish community are actively engaged in promoting and protecting these rights, both within the community and in concert with stakeholders outside of the community

Our mission is to promote and protect the universal rights of all people, drawing on Jewish experiences and values.

We will:

- remake a compelling case for human rights values
- campaign for change in defined human rights areas through a combination of advocacy, policy analysis, public campaigning and education
- lead and grow a group of committed Jewish human rights advocates
- maximise our capacity to work effectively

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
René Cassin builds on Monsieur Cassin’s legacy – by working to protect and promote universal human rights. We do this through advocacy, policy analysis, public campaigning and education.

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

- Protecting human rights provisions in the UK
- Asylum and detention
- Discrimination against Gypsies, Roma and Travellers
- Modern slavery and human trafficking

Our campaigns are complemented by our educational and outreach programmes within the Jewish community.

CAMPAIGNS

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

‘Disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind’.

So runs the preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, co-drafted by our namesake Monsieur René Cassin. Human rights treaties – like the UDHR and the European Convention on Human Rights – were the civilised world’s response to the horrors of the Holocaust. Both were drawn up to say ‘Never again!’, and to protect people from oppressive governments.

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. So, we believe it is essential that we retain the Human Rights Act – which incorporates the European Convention into UK law – and remain a signatory to the Convention itself.
Human rights – a legacy of the Holocaust

The centre point of our work to mark Holocaust Memorial Day in January 2016 was a packed public meeting at Jewish Cultural Centre, JW3 – where former Attorney-General Dominic Grieve and Rabbi Julia Neuberger discussed the genesis of the modern human rights regime at our event entitled ‘From the Holocaust to the Human Rights Act’. This led the Jewish Chronicle to invite Dominic to contribute a weighty opinion-piece ‘History shows why we need a Human Rights Act’ the following week.

We also produced a joint statement with Liberty emphasising that ‘human rights laws developed as the civilised world’s response to the horrors of the Holocaust’ and that ‘... our rights and liberties – vital to protect us from such tyranny in the future – are hard-won, but easily squandered’.

Engaging the Jewish community

In our key role as a link between the Jewish community and broader human rights movement, we introduced key individuals from the human rights sector to a group of influential rabbis, to discuss the future if the Human Rights Act. The meeting prompted Rabbi Jonathan Wittenberg to blog ‘It should be with grave unease that we as Jews should contemplate the possibility that this country might repeal the Human Rights Act’.

Further evidence that René Cassin’s message is resonating with the Jewish community came when the 2016 edition of the Board of Deputies’ Jewish Manifesto expressed support for the Human Rights Act; condemned modern slavery and human trafficking; and called for urgent action on anti-Roma discrimination.


After the Government announced, in May 2016, its intention to repeal the Human Rights Act, we joined 136 other organisations – ranging from religious and professional bodies to law firms, unions, environmental charities and the families of terrorism victims – in a pledge to preserve the Act. We followed this up with a face-to-face meeting with Dominic Raab, the Minister for Human Rights, and a letter (co-signed by 40 rabbis) to the Justice Secretary, Liz Truss. By the time we received a reply, from Sir Oliver Heald who had replaced Dominic Raab at the Ministry of Justice, events had moved on significantly. The fall-out from the EU referendum had led the new Prime Minister,
Theresa May, to shelve plans to repeal the Human Rights Act and withdraw the UK from the European Convention.

On the issue of Brexit, we made a detailed submission to Parliament’s Joint Committee on Human Rights, outlining our concerns that withdrawal from the EU could lead to: weakened protections for victims of slavery and human trafficking; poorer support for asylum-seekers; and the removal of vital European oversight into how the UK proposes to tackle discrimination against its Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.

On the international stage, we made submissions – both in our own right, and in a joint submission of 175 organisations – to the UN’s Universal Periodic Review, which examines the UK’s human rights record every four and a half years. Through our submissions, we urged the UK to:

- Preserve the Human Rights Act in its current form
- Address inequalities faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities
- End indefinite detention of migrants
- Build on progress made in the area of modern slavery

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

René Cassin has led the Jewish community’s response to the UK’s shameful practice of detaining migrants indefinitely.

As many as 30,000 migrants – including children, pregnant women and people suffering from mental health problems – are detained by the UK each year. Of EU countries, only Greece detains more. But the UK is alone in not imposing a time limit on this detention. Some migrants are locked up for years. Indefinite immigration detention brings untold misery for innocent people held in prison-like conditions, with no knowledge of when they will be released. It also seriously damages the UK’s international reputation for defending human rights.

A step in the right direction – significant progress on immigration detention

In April 2016, as MPs and peers debated the Immigration Bill, we organised (with Tzelem, the rabbinical call for social and economic justice) a multi-faith meeting at the Houses of Parliament. We brought together Jewish, Christian and Muslim leaders, Parliamentarians, activists, and experts by experience of detention to call for reform of the immigration detention system. The event complemented our #Key4Freedom campaign, in which we encouraged Jewish supporters to remember the plight of detainees when commemorating their own hard-won freedom from slavery in Egypt at the Seder table for Pesach.
Our aim was to build momentum for change, following the recommendations of Stephen Shaw’s *Review into the Welfare in Detention of Vulnerable Persons* (which reported in January 2016 and to which we made a submission in May 2015). And that aim was – at least partially – successful: the Government announced that it would no longer detain pregnant women indefinitely and would allow, for the first time ever, automatic judicial oversight within the system.

**Jews in detention – past memories and a tragic reminder of present realities**

Fritz Lustig is in his mid-nineties. A refugee from Nazi Germany, he escaped to Britain intending to fight for the British army in the Second World War. Instead, he found himself interned on the Isle of Man. We created a video of Fritz’s story, to highlight the parallels between his generation of Jews and many of today’s asylum-seekers.

But the Jewish connection to the barbarity of the UK’s current detention policy was more starkly brought home by the death of Amir Siman-Tov at Colnbrook Detention Centre on 17 February 2016. Amir was a Moroccan Jew who had lived legally in the UK for several years. His wife was pregnant when he died. He was the 26th person to die in a UK detention centre. René Cassin’s website carries a moving tribute to Amir, written by his friend Michael Goldin.

**Better together – working with partners**

René Cassin has played a key role in the NGO umbrella group, the Detention Forum – coordinating its interfaith element, and helping develop its communications and overall strategy. At a grassroots level, in April and November 2016 we ran – with Right to Remain – two-day workshops on the practicalities of UK asylum law, equipping participants to represent asylum-seekers.

*Thank you for a hugely informative (and heartbreaking) workshop. Feeling motivated!*  
Tweet from delegate on asylum workshop
The unprecedented flows of refugees escaping conflict in the Middle East and North Africa have continued. In response, René Cassin has been an active member of the Jewish community’s ‘Refugee Taskforce’ and we took the lead in developing and delivering a series of themed events for a ‘Refugee Track’ at the Limmud conference in December. The first ever social justice theme to get its own track at the premier Jewish conference.

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

Slavery is not history. Although it conjures images of the Israelites in Egypt or the trans-Atlantic trade, it is here and it is now. In the UK today there are as many as 13,000 victims of slavery or trafficking, prompting Theresa May to call it ‘the great human rights issue of our time’. The Modern Slavery Act 2015 represents welcome progress on this issue. But that progress has been increasingly overshadowed by the realisation that this crime is even more widespread and pernicious than originally thought, and the concern that the legislation does too little to address the needs of victims.

**René Cassin reaches Barcelona – via our Human Rights Shabbat on slavery**

Our Human Rights Shabbat – including a comprehensive resource pack on modern slavery – coincided with International Human Rights Day on 10 December 2016. This year’s Shabbat reached a record number of 45 communities, including one in Barcelona.

**Anti-Slavery Commissioner praises ‘unique’ René Cassin**

Also in December 2016, we met the UK’s Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, Kevin Hyland OBE, to discuss ways he could support our work to alert the Jewish community to the scourge of modern slavery. Praising our Shabbat resource pack, he said ‘I am pleased to see faith groups taking admirable action against this gross injustice. René Cassin is in a unique position to bring change where change is needed most.’

Throughout the year, we continued to build our links with other faith groups (eg CARITAS) and NGOs (eg Human Trafficking Foundation) working on the vital issue.

**‘The great human rights issue of our time’ – essay competition**

Modern slavery was the subject of this year’s René Cassin ‘Human Writes’ essay competition. We were extremely lucky that leading legal commentator, Joshua Rozenberg, gave so generously of his time to read and comment on the shortlisted entries and judge the winners. Ben Cartwright won in the 18-and-under category,
whilst Will Bordell was, in Joshua’s words, ‘the clear winner’ amongst the 19-and-overs. Will’s opening paragraph neatly sums up the everyday nature of modern slavery, and shows why public education is key to countering this appalling crime and helping its victims:

There are some questions we prefer not to answer:

- Who put the cocoa in my chocolate bar?
- How was that dress so cheap?
- Where does the man who washed my car sleep at night?

Will Bordell, winning entrant to René Cassin ‘Human Writes’ essay competition

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

Gypsies, Roma and Travellers share a history of persecution with Jewish people. Both were targeted by the Nazis during the Second World War, having suffered centuries of racism and hostility. 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 these marginalised communities have long been subjected to discrimination from officials and casual prejudice in the media. And now, since the EU referendum, they are suffering from a marked rise in hate crime.

A Jewish voice speaking out against hate crime

Following the spike in incidents that followed the Brexit vote in June, we prioritised hate crime – with which the Jewish community is all too familiar – as a key issue on which to show solidarity with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) groups. We made a number of practical suggestions to the Home Affairs Select Committee on this issue. One such suggestion was that other communities should follow the successful example of the Jewish Community Security Trust, and we have since facilitated contact between the Trust and GRT organisations.

A major obstacle to tackling hate crime is the fact that it is under-reported. This is a particular problem among GRT communities where, although 98% of individuals report experiencing hate crime, only 27% sought legal advice or advocacy. So, in September 2016, we lent our full support to the Traveller Movement’s #OperationReportHate campaign and, in October, highlighted National Hate Crime Awareness Week.
Moral support and practical help

Beyond the worrying example of rising hate crime, René Cassin worked to express our solidarity with the UK’s GRT communities in other ways:

- we galvanised a large Jewish communal presence at the annual memorial – held in London on 2 August – to the Roma genocide perpetrated by the Nazis
- we worked with the Traveller Movement and the Irish Chaplaincy to call for GRT children to be included as a category in the ethnic monitoring of the youth justice system. Although technically outside the time parameters of this document, we can report a successful outcome to this campaign – in March 2017, the Government agreed to start the monitoring we requested in a programme due to be fully operational by March 2018
- we gave an outlet, via a blog on our website, for a member of the UK Traveller community to voice her views on topical issues – thus connecting her day-to-day experiences with those of the Jewish community

A big thank you to the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust

René Cassin is grateful to the JRCT for supporting our work on creating connections and fostering solidarity between the UK’s Jewish and GRT communities.

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 centre piece 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. The programme has been a huge success in providing a platform for Fellows to develop knowledge, skills and contacts.

‘I feel I have much more knowledge and confidence to discuss human rights affairs globally and in the UK’.

‘It’s motivated me to get more involved in human rights campaigns’.

Feedback from graduating Fellows
René Cassin alumni

With the third cohort of RCFP Fellows graduating in April 2016 – adding to participants in our earlier Activist Enrichment Programme, and our regular stream of interns and volunteers – we now have a sizeable and motivated group of alumni.

Alumni have begun to make an important contribution to René Cassin’s work, through participation in our campaign groups, help at our events, and by writing blogs for our website and elsewhere.

As a way of continuing our educational role and nurturing the important resource that our alumni represent, we have started regular informal evening sessions on topical human rights issues, led by expert speakers. The inaugural event in this ‘Hummus and Human Rights’ series was held in December 2016, with Professor Francesca Klug OBE (of our Advisory Council) leading a discussion on ‘Politics and Human Rights’.

Education in the community

It has been an extremely busy year for our human rights educational work in the Jewish community. In addition to organising the ‘Refugee Track’ programme at this year’s national Limmud conference (see page 7), we have also presented sessions at:

- three regional Limmud days (Manchester, Leeds and Birmingham)
- four synagogues (MOSAIC, New West End, New North London and Wimbledon)
- five Jewish youth movements (including LJY-Netzer and Habonim Dror)
- four schools (including JCOSS)
- two university societies (including the London School of Economics).

As a sign of our commitment to education in its broadest sense we have, for the first time, provided school students on work experience programmes an insight into the work of a small charity and an introduction to contemporary human rights issues.

‘I have learned a great deal in the short amount of time’.

‘I learnt why human rights are important, especially as Jews’

Feedback from work experience students
René Cassin relies 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 gift through our website at [www.renecassin.org/donate](http://www.renecassin.org/donate)
- Better still, **become a ‘Friend of René Cassin’** by making a monthly donation (via the ‘I’d like to give regularly’ option) [www.renecassin.org/donate](http://www.renecassin.org/donate)
- Become an **Individual Patron** or **Corporate Supporter** – email the office for further details [info@renecassin.org](mailto:info@renecassin.org)
- **Get involved in our campaigns** – visit our website for more details
- **Volunteer with us** – email [info@renecassin.org](mailto:info@renecassin.org)
- **Sign up for our newsletter** at [www.renecassin.org](http://www.renecassin.org)
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- **Like us on Facebook** [www.facebook.com/renecassin](https://www.facebook.com/renecassin)
- **Tell your friends, family and colleagues about our work**
Note on period covered by these accounts:

The figures below relate to the 15 months from 1 October 2015 to 31 December 2016. This is because René Cassin has changed its accounting year, which now begins on 1 January.

Revenue and Support 2015-16

Donations 113,961

Total revenue and support 113,961

Expenditure 2015-16

Costs of raising voluntary income 1,208

Charitable activities 143,441

Total expenditure 144,649

Many thanks to our supporters

Allen Lane Foundation  Pears Foundation
AW60 Fund  Shoresh Charitable Trust
Berwin Leighton Paisner  Sigrid Rausing Trust
Bluston Charitable Settlement  UJA Federation of New York
Garden Court Chambers
Humanitarian Trust
Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust  And to our individual Patrons (who give £1,000 or more annually) and Friends
JHub  (who give regularly by Direct Debit or Standing Order)
Mishcon de Reya
OUR PEOPLE

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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.