



## René Cassin, General Election 2017: Key Human Rights Issues

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### **Introduction**

There's a General Election on 8 June. It's a rare opportunity to help shape the future of the country over the next five years. To ask some basic and important questions. What kind of country do I want to live in? How should my vote reflect my values? What kind of future do I want for my family, my friends, my community?

In the next few weeks, candidates competing to become your MP will be asking you for your vote. But to make a proper choice you too need to ask them questions.

Jews are taught to 'pursue justice'. How should we apply that teaching in the short time before the election? Human rights are the cornerstone of a just society, the expression of our communal commitment to fairness, equality and compassion. This is our chance to renew and strengthen that commitment.

Here at René Cassin we have asked ourselves: what are the five most important human rights and social justice issues at stake at this Election? This briefing aims to inform the Jewish community about how they can raise these issues with candidates. Our list is not exhaustive – but it covers the issues that our supporters are most concerned about.

Each section has a simple policy 'ask' – along with some useful background information on that issue and a question that can be posed to a prospective candidate.

Our contact details are at the bottom of the briefing. Please get in touch if you have any questions about the issues highlighted in the document. If you use the briefing and get responses from any of your candidates do get in touch with us through email or social media and let us know. It will help us hold successful candidates to account. If you can't make any hustings but still want to contact your local candidates and raise the issues below, you can download the template letter from our website.

### **About René Cassin**

René Cassin is a charity working to promote and protect universal human rights, drawing on Jewish experience and values. We are named after Monsieur René Cassin, the French Jewish lawyer who co-drafted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in the aftermath of the Second World War.



## **The Top Line**

*Our next Government should...*

- 1. Protect the Human Rights Act and maintain our commitment to the European Convention on Human Rights**
- 2. Keep existing equality and human rights laws when we leave the EU**
- 3. Ensure people cannot be held in immigration detention for more than 28 days**
- 4. Provide better support for survivors of modern day slavery**
- 5. Address hate crime and discrimination faced by minority groups**

## **Safeguarding Human Rights in the UK**

1. The Jewish community knows all too well what happens when societies fail to uphold the human rights of vulnerable individuals and communities. As such, we are particularly concerned about the potential for regressing from internationally agreed universal standards that apply to everyone in our country such as the European Convention on Human Rights (Convention). The Convention was set up as a direct response to World War Two and the Holocaust.

The Convention should be proudly lauded as a British initiative and one that protects the vulnerable and provides justice to those stripped of it. To turn our backs on the Convention and the Human Rights Act (which enshrines the Convention in British law) could undermine the idea of human rights at home and abroad.

**Policy Ask: Protect the Human Rights Act and maintain our commitment to the European Convention on Human Rights**

**Question to Candidate:** Will you commit to the European Convention on Human Rights and support the Human Rights Act?

2. The Government is introducing a 'Great Repeal Bill'. The Bill is designed to transfer EU legislation into UK law. Parliament will be able to 'amend, repeal and improve' laws as required once the UK has ceased to be a member of the EU. The majority of EU legislation will be treated as 'secondary legislation', which means it does not have to be debated or scrutinised by Parliament in the same way that primary legislation does. Many EU laws relate to issues of human rights, fairness and equality. It is essential that changes to laws that effect our rights are properly debated in Parliament.

**Policy Ask: Keep existing equality and human rights laws when we leave the EU**

**Question to Candidate: Will you commit to protecting existing equality and human rights laws when we leave the EU? And ensure that any legislative changes in these fields undergo full parliamentary scrutiny?**

### **Immigration Detention**

3. The UK is the only country in Europe that has a policy of indefinite immigration detention. Every year more than 30,000 men, women and children are locked up without knowledge of when, or if, they will be released. Countless reports, including [cross-party inquiries](#), have shown the system to be 'expensive, ineffective and unjust.' The UK detains far too many people and for far too long, especially considering that a range of community-based alternatives to detention remain under-explored and under-discussed.

The Government has agreed in principle to broad reforms suggested by a Home Office commissioned report but these have been slow in arriving or not implemented at all. Prolonged detention is not only unacceptable for vulnerable people – it is also a catalyst to creating greater vulnerability.

**Policy ask: Ensure people cannot be held in immigration detention for more than 28 days**

**Question to Candidate:** Do you agree that it is time for a time limit on immigration detention?

### **Modern Day Slavery**

4. Slavery is a topic that Jews across the world discuss every year during the festival of Passover. But, sadly, slavery is not a thing of the past. Modern slavery, including human trafficking, continues and must be challenged. Millions of people live in modern day slavery around the world, including an estimated 13,000 in the United Kingdom. The 2015 Modern Slavery Act was a welcome step in the right direction however there continue to be areas where more must be done.

The support currently provided to survivors of human trafficking and modern slavery is not meeting the needs of the vulnerable. Support ends abruptly and too early and no information is retained as to what happens to survivors in the longer term. The current situation means that many end up destitute and put



at danger of re-trafficking. For more information see the five main recommendations provided by 23 leading anti-trafficking organisations [here](#):

**Policy ask: Provide better support for survivors of modern day slavery**

**Question to Candidate:** Will you work with us to improve the lives of survivors of modern day slavery in the UK?

### **Hate Crime and Discrimination**

5. The last year has seen a marked increase in hate crime targeting minorities in this country. When hate crime increases all minorities suffer. Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities are amongst the most discriminated against in the UK – 90% of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers have reported suffering racial abuse. Lack of suitable ethnic monitoring means that there is a lack of understanding within public authorities on the housing, education and health needs of this community.

In 2012, a Ministerial Working Group promised 28 high level commitments on tackling inequalities experienced by Gypsies and Travellers. But no detail on the implementation of these commitments has been advanced, nor evidence that they have led to a reduction in inequalities faced by these communities.

**Policy ask: Address hate crime and discrimination faced by minority groups, especially Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities**

**Questions to Candidate:** How will you identify and address hate crime and discrimination faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller members of your constituency?

### ***The Bottom line***

All political parties should take this opportunity to take a stand for the laws and values that protect the rights of all individuals across the UK, especially those of the most vulnerable.

### **Contact Details**

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