

# The Jewish Case for the European Convention on Human Rights

## A Parliamentary Briefing – May 2024

René Cassin strongly believes that the UK should remain in the European Convention on Human Rights. As representatives entrusted with making the case for the rights and freedoms of our citizens, we believe your commitment to the European Convention is imperative.

As the traumatic extent of the horrors of the Holocaust became known towards the end of the Second World War, so did the understanding that a state must never again be able to perpetuate such horrors against its own people. Amongst others, it was Jewish lawyers, who had lost all their family in the Holocaust, who made a major contribution to the international human rights framework that emerged. This was encapsulated in the European Convention on Human Rights and since has been incorporated into UK law through the Human Rights Act.

The European Convention is a demonstration of the UK's positive contribution to an international rules-based order. The British Conservative politician David Maxwell Fyfe drafted the European Convention on the Jewish lawyer Hersch Lauterpacht's human rights framework. Both men worked on the UK's prosecution team at the Nuremberg trials, which we see as a demonstration of the strong and historic link of British and Jewish people working together to uphold human rights.

Currently, the UK can be proud that it has one of the best human rights records in Europe. To leave the European Convention and join Belarus and Russia as the outsiders would be a rejection of Britain's place in the world.

As Jewish people, we have experience of seeking refuge in foreign countries in circumstances where to be sent back would mean certain death. This experience underlines our concern over legislation aimed at reducing the rights of minorities and the marginalised in our society. As a minority ourselves, we know the importance of standing up for the rights of other minorities.

This is particularly alarming as it creates a division between those who are 'deserving' and those who are 'undeserving' of human rights. Those marginalised in this way are those who are seen as unpopular with limited support or advocacy available on their behalf. They are also those who are more likely to suffer from human rights abuses in the first place.

To quote Brenda Hale, the former President of the UK Supreme Court, "democracy values everyone equally, even when the majority does not." As Jews, it is this sentiment that lets us know we are safe and welcome in the UK. Without the legal frameworks which uphold

democracy – such as the European Convention on Human Rights and the Human Rights Act – we fear that minorities will not be valued in the UK.

Suggested attempts to weaken the UK domestic and international human rights obligations would:

- Disproportionately impact minority and marginalised groups;
- Threaten the peace in Northern Ireland;
- Destabilise the United Kingdom;
- And place the UK in a ‘club’ with Russia and Belarus as the only non-convening countries.

The development of human rights is founded in the Jewish experience of an appalling breach of human dignity and basic freedoms, and greatly shaped by Jewish lawyers responding to Jewish experience. Our faith, history and values lead to both the Jewish community’s obligation and determination to fight for human rights.

### **About René Cassin**

[www.renecassin.org](http://www.renecassin.org)

René Cassin is a UK human rights charity (Reg No 1117472), named after the French-Jewish co-author of the UN’s 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

René Cassin works to promote and protect universal rights drawing on Jewish experience and Jewish values. René Cassin works:

- within the Jewish community – by building support for human rights values amongst British Jews;
- in the wider community – by bringing the authority of a Jewish perspective on issues that resonate with Jewish experience.

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