



# ELDH European Association of Lawyers for Democracy & World Human Rights

WITH LAWYERS  
IN 22 COUNTRIES

EJDM Europäische Vereinigung von Juristinnen & Juristen für Demokratie und Menschenrechte in der Welt

EJDH Asociación Europea de los Juristas por la Democracia y los Derechos Humanos en el Mundo

EJDH Association Européenne des Juristes pour la Démocratie & les Droits de l'Homme

EGDU Associazione Europea delle Giuriste e dei Giuristi per la Democrazia e i diritti dell'Uomo nel Mondo

Equality Privacy Social Rights  
No Racism Peace No Torture No War  
Self-Determination of Peoples Democracy  
Human Rights Rights of Migrants

Bologna, Düsseldorf, London, Vienna, 22 March 2023

## PRESS RELEASE – 22 March 2023

**International lawyers assert multiple breaches of human rights and international law by the UK Government in Northern Ireland ahead of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement.**

It is not the usual lawyers and activists based in Northern Ireland raising their concerns about human rights breaches by the UK Government in the region, but an esteemed delegation of lawyers from Europe, South Africa, and the United States of America, who have confirmed the UK Government's failure to safeguard and implement human rights commitments from the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, and in accordance with international law.

### **Key quotes:**

*“The UK Government should cease its legal and political attacks on the B/GFA. It is clear to the Delegation that the UK Government is not acting in good faith or fulfilling its role as an honest broker in maintaining the terms of the B/GFA.”*

*“When the Delegation compares the HRA 1998 to its constitutionally aligned and entrenched equivalent in Ireland, the European Convention on Human Rights Act 2003, this suggests that ultimately human rights in NI would be better protected in a reunified Ireland, albeit this is a matter for the people of Ireland under the B/GFA.”*

*“The Legacy Bill should be withdrawn from the Westminster legislative process.”*

*“The Irish Government should commit to making an inter-state case in the European Court of Human Rights against the UK Government's Legacy Bill if it becomes law.”*

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## **Background**

An international delegation of lawyers from Europe, South Africa, and the United States of America ('the Delegation') visited Northern Ireland between 28 September 2022 and 4 October 2022 to talk to human rights organisations, victims' groups, and trade unions to hear their concerns regarding the state of the peace process and human rights in Northern Ireland ahead of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement (B/GFA).

The Delegation included prominent international lawyers from the [European Lawyers for Democracy and Human Rights](#) and the [International Association of Democratic Lawyers](#). It also conducted a series of Zoom interviews with human rights organisations, victims' groups and trade unions over the summer of 2022.

Interviews were held with the Migrant Centre NI; the NI Human Rights Consortium; Relatives for Justice; the Pat Finucane Centre; the WAVE Trauma Centre; Committee on the Administration of Justice; the Equality Coalition; the Human Rights Committee of the Law Society of Northern Ireland; and academics from the Transitional Justice Institute.

The Delegation believes, considering the evidence it has heard and reviewed, that there is an attempt by the present UK Government to unilaterally dismantle the human rights framework of the B/GFA, which is the foundation for peace in the region. The Delegation will disseminate their findings to their influential national associations of human rights lawyers. The report will also be sent to the UK Government, the Irish Government, the EU Commission, and the United States government. The Delegation consider this period to be a crucial moment in Irish history and is pleased to play its part in safeguarding human rights in Northern Ireland.

Thomas Schmidt, Co-Secretary General of the European Association of Lawyers for Democracy and Human Rights (ELDH), said,

*"The Delegation was disturbed to hear evidence about the regression of human rights standards in Northern Ireland. We are aware that the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement will occur next month. Now is the time for the UK Government to urgently commit to realising human rights in Northern Ireland."*

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