

### *On the Human Rights Act (HRA)*

The HRA is a finely-crafted piece of legislation which has provided an invaluable framework for the protection of human rights in the United Kingdom. No model of domestic legislation giving effect to Convention rights has been more effective than the HRA in enabling national courts to shape the development of Convention rights. The interpretation and application of the Act by the courts in this country have not only been exemplary in achieving the aim of 'bringing rights home' but have breathed a new life into the rights guaranteed by the Convention. The use of the Act by the national courts to analyse the problem raised and to explain clearly and fully the reasons for arriving at a particular decision has had a significant influence on the development of the jurisprudence of the European Court itself. In cases where those views do not correspond with, or are critical of, the established case-law of the Strasbourg Court, the judgments of the national courts have had the salutary effect of requiring the Strasbourg Court to revisit its jurisprudence and have thereby contributed to a valuable dialogue between the national and international courts. This has immeasurably assisted and improved the development of the case-law not only in cases against the United Kingdom but across all member States.

### *On civic education on human rights in the UK*

Public opinion on the effect of the HRA and, more particularly, on decisions of the Strasbourg Court, which the national courts are required by the Act to take into account, has undoubtedly been negatively influenced by the tabloid press and by public statements of certain judges and politicians. It is, nevertheless, right to recall that, in its report at a time when such criticisms of the system were at their height, the Commission on a Bill of Rights acknowledged that, during their consultations, there had

been overwhelming public support to retain the system established by the HRA. Work is being done by institutions such as the British Institute of Human Rights, in which Sir Nicolas Bratza has a role, to disseminate information on what human rights are and how the HRA protects those rights, thereby counteracting unfair and inaccurate criticisms of the working of the Act. There is a growing appreciation of the need for the HRA in many sections of society, including those concerned with medical and social care, mental health and treatment of the disabled. This appreciation is being substantially developed at local level, where organisations such as that mentioned above not only work to support community groups to make use of the rights guaranteed but provide training for public bodies and services in the application of the Act. The focus of their work is not on litigation under the HRA but on how the HRA continues to make improvements in the everyday lives of UK citizens. The numbers of stakeholders engaging with the IHRAR, in its Call for Evidence and in its public roadshows, is testimony to the increasing awareness of, and interest in, human rights and in their effective protection under the HRA.