

Statement from the British Institute of Human Rights

Speaker 1: Fairuz Choudhury, Lived Experience Expert

“The lack of adequate knowledge of human rights law has continued to limit human rights for women in UK, in particular Women from Black and Minoritised communities with intersectional experiences face discrimination at multiple levels. Women fleeing violence and abuse from these communities face grave violation of their human rights, to the point that they feel human rights are only for the privileged not for women like them.

Women who feel hopeless and talk about going back to their abusers, simply because of the way they are treated by housing services, who refuse to re-house them in safe accommodations, adult social services who refuse to provide adequate care to terminally ill victims of abuse, enabling the abuser to continue to psychologically and economically abuse the victim and women with disabilities whose disability benefits are rejected because they are considered to be fit enough according to the DWP assessments, these are just a few examples where women felt like they were treated as though they were “undeserving” of human rights. All of these could be avoided, if the public bodies provided proper human rights training to all their staff allowing them to understand how their actions were violating human rights, in these cases, the right not to be treated in an inhuman and degrading way (protected by both the ICCPR and our UK domestic law, the Human Right Act).

Women from Black and Minoritised communities in UK, with insecure immigration status fleeing abuse, or women with mental health issues or those with contact with the criminal justice system or women who are tireless fighting for the custody of their children in family courts, all these women continue to face intersectional barriers in accessing basic human rights, because of the front-line public body professionals lacking proper knowledge of human rights, contributing to the rigid and oppressive mechanisms and systems that simply do not acknowledge the human rights of women with intersectional experiences.

It is crucial to make human rights accessible and inclusive for all in UK, including women facing multiple barriers due to intersectional experiences.”

Speaker 2: Kirsten Peebles, Lived Experience Expert:

“My only child is autistic and when he was 14 he was sectioned in a mental health hospital. Read without knowledge or understanding of human rights law, the UK Mental Health Act gave legal powers to give my son so many drugs they turned him into a zombie. It gave powers to put him in metal handcuffs to go for a shower. It gave powers to transport him in a cage from one hospital to another. My child was not a criminal, he was just autistic, in distress, frightened and alone.

Worst of all it gave them powers to put my child in a solitary confinement cell for weeks at a time. When they put him in there, he was restrained by several members of staff, stripped naked and forced into stiff non-rip clothing.

Because the hospital staff didn't know about, or protect, my son's human rights, he acted like a 'caged animal'. He believed he was less than human, unvalued in society. Sometimes he experienced hallucinations from sensory deprivation. As his mother I was powerless to comfort or protect him, they wouldn't let me see or speak to him. I used to wonder if he called for me, if he wished I was there to help him.

I was angry and afraid every minute of the day. When I knew he was in solitary confinement I wanted to sleep on the kitchen floor, I couldn't bear my comfortable bed. Because I knew he was alone in the dark and I wasn't there for him.

They stole my son's childhood. They stole his childhood from both of us.”

Annex (will not be read aloud in statement)

About BIHR

The British Institute of Human Rights (BIHR) is a charity working in communities across the UK to enable positive change through the practical use of human rights law. We have a working focus on the rights contained within the ICCPR as our primary purpose is the implementation of the Human Rights Act which brings many of the rights in the ICCPR into UK domestic law. We work beyond the courts every day:

- supporting people and communities with the information they need to claim their civil and political rights
- supporting organisations that have public power to live up to their legal duties
- ensuring real-life evidence of the difference civil and political rights make are heard by decision makers.

Our work directly with people, communities and public bodies puts us in a unique position to call for the development of national law and policy which truly understands people's experiences of their human rights. We hear the stories of people whose lives have been changed in real and tangible ways by civil and political rights protections, we also see the impact when these rights are not upheld. We think it's important that everyone else hears those stories, too, especially our UK Government who have the power to roll back on these fundamental protections or to commit to supporting their implementation through rights respecting law, policy and practice within public bodies.

About BIHR's lived experience RITES Committee

BIHR's RITES Committee (standing for real-life insights, tips, experiences and stories) is made up of experts by experience from across the UK who have used the Human Rights Act to achieve change – for themselves, the people they work with or their loved ones. From lived experience of caring for family members with complex needs to working in frontline public services, each of our experts brings a unique perspective of human rights in practice.

Fairuz Choudhury, Lived Experience Expert and RITES Committee member

Fairuz Choudhury has worked in the UK charity sector for the past 17 years. Fairuz has extensive experience of developing, creating and managing services in Gender Equality, Welfare Rights Advice, Legal pro bono work, Mental Health Advocacy, Refugee Advocacy and Violence Against Women and Girls services. She specialises in working with women and girls from Black and Minoritised Ethnic communities with multiple disadvantages and complex needs. Some of the key areas of her work have been – understanding trauma, its impact on women and children, intersectional experiences of and barriers faced by Black and Minoritised women and girls in accessing services and the effect of cost of living on intersectional groups. She is currently working on developing services to

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ensure human rights framework is applied in community services. Fairuz was called to the Bar in 2009 and is a member of The Honourable Society of Lincoln's Inn. She is also a UN Women UK Delegate for CSW68.

Kirsten Peebles, Lived Experience Expert and RITES Committee member

Kirsten is a single parent of an autistic son who was locked in mental health hospitals from the ages of 14 to 17. While an inpatient he was subjected to high levels of restrictive practice and his human rights were breached on many occasions. Kirsten fought for him to be discharged from hospital and receive the right support in his own home. She now focuses on supporting health and social care practitioners to uphold human rights and eliminate harmful restrictive practices.

Kirsten is also co-chair of the Building the Right Support Advisory Group and member of its Delivery Board. She is a regular peer reviewer of health and social care systems for the Local Government Association. She also works part time with BILD in a new project as Buddy Coordinator. She supports people with lived experience to befriend people in hospital who are subject to high levels of restriction.

Kirsten would like to draw the Committee's attention to recent work on solitary confinement and segregation, including Restraint Reduction Network's video, [Solitary Confinement – the case for elimination \(voices of lived experience\)](#), [Baroness Hollins' November 2023 letter to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care](#) and Baroness Hollins' November 2023 report, ["My heart breaks – solitary confinement in hospital has no therapeutic benefit for people with a learning disability and autistic people"](#).

BIHR's evidence submission

We provided an evidence based written submission on the UK's compliance with the ICCPR to the Human Rights Committee. Our submission looked primarily at Section II of the State report: Constitutional and Legal Framework within which the Covenant is implemented – specifically:

- A) Reform of the Human Rights Act; and
- D) Awareness Raising

Our submission offered questions for the UK Government, legal analysis, real-life stories, and recommendations based on BIHR's direct work in each of these areas. Our aim is to encourage the UK Government to engage fully with the ICCPR process as a way to assess progress and improve accountability in relation to its human rights obligations. [Our submission is available on the ohchr website but we have linked directly to it here.](#)