



global witness

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Rt. Hon. Kenneth Clarke QC MP
Secretary of State
Ministry of Justice
102 Petty France
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27th May 2010

Dear Lord Chancellor,

I am writing in support of Lord Lester's Private Members' Defamation Bill. I would urge that you consider adopting it as legislation in this current Parliament. It is certainly a very positive step that your government has undertaken to review issues around libel reform however a succession of governments have, over many years, carried out a number of reviews already. Thus there is a body of existing work that can be utilised without having to incur the time and expense of yet another review process. Indeed Lord Lester's Bill has clearly incorporated much of the work of aforementioned reform reviews.

I write to you as the director of Global Witness, a British based organisation that works on issues of natural resources funding conflict and corruption and which seeks to find pragmatic solutions such as the Kimberley Process diamond control scheme and the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative. Global Witness is at the cutting edge of the impact of libel tourism and, increasingly, of privacy issues. A co-nominee for the 2003 Nobel Peace Prize for our conflict diamonds campaign, we are a serious and practical organisation, campaigning on matters of public interest including issues of conflict, corruption and transparency. We have built a reputation for painstakingly researched reports that are widely published and utilised by policymakers around the world. According to the many lawyers who work with us on report preparation, Global Witness has some of the best practice amongst UK NGOs for a responsible process of publication.

However, this process is very different from the daily or weekly turnover of newspapers. It also often involves very large numbers of companies and individuals and very complex chains of trade across many countries. Reports can take up to two years from initial research to the final, published copy. Such reports are often used as source materials over a number of years by many parties including policymakers within governments and in international institutions. When giving evidence to the Media Select Committee last year it became evident to me that the Committee members had heard from a lot of lawyers but had not yet developed an understanding of the issues facing NGOs writing on matters of public interest. The role of NGOs in publishing on matters of public interest is likely to become more important as increasing numbers of newspapers cut back on quality long-term investigative reporting of the sort that brought the Thalidomide scandal to light. Global Witness is an official affiliate of the Libel reform Campaign, and supports Lord Lester's Private Member's Bill.

Yours sincerely,

Charmian Gooch, Director, Global Witness.

CC Deputy Prime Minister Rt. Hon Nick Clegg MP
CC Minister of State, Lord McNally