

28th October 2008

John Porter
Chief Office Clerk
Joint Committee on Human Rights
Committee Office
House of Commons
7 Millbank
London SW1P 3JA

The British Humanist Association would like to draw the Committee's attention to the Ministry of Justice's offender management strategies. In particular to the inclusion of religious groups in the management of youth and adult offenders, both in prisons and in the community – and the Ministry of Justice's failure to take into account serious concerns regarding the human rights and equalities implications of such a strategy.

In 2008, we responded to three submissions (responses enclosed), which set out our concerns.

We are astounded that in none of the Ministry of Justice's responses to the consultations and the subsequent third sector strategies have any of our concerns and points been addressed. Nor is there any discussion of safeguards to protect against discrimination and infringements of human rights by religious groups working with offenders – a real risk not least given the wide exemptions from equality law afforded to religious groups to allow them to discriminate on religious grounds and in various ways against their staff and service users and the fact that they are not bound by the Human Rights Act 1998.

We would like the Committee to look into this matter, as we believe that the Ministry of Justice and the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) have not only failed to take into account or respond appropriately to concerns about their strategy of including religious groups more fully in offender management but are now pursuing strategies which potentially endanger the human rights and equal status of offenders.

If you would like any more information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

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cc: House of Commons Justice Committee