I am a member of the local Amnesty International group and am writing to you as you are a candidate for this area in the imminent general election.

The Human Rights Act has been in force now for some 15 years, for I would like to canvass your views on how it can best be protected as we embark on a new parliament.

As I am sure you know, the Human Rights Act incorporates into British law the European Convention on Human Rights. This convention was drawn up by, among others, British lawyers, and the UK was the first country to sign it. Prior to the passing of the Human Rights Act, those who felt that their rights under the convention were being undermined had to take their court cases to Strasbourg, now they can appeal directly to a British court. Additionally, many public bodies have moderated their policies to ensure that they comply with the provisions of the Act, and many citizens have been able to use the Act to achieve better protection for their rights on an individual basis.

Nonetheless, the Act has been under sustained and mendacious attack from certain quarters, particularly parts of the press. I hope I do not need to tell you that reports that, thanks to the Human Rights Act, prisoners are now entitled to hardcore pornography are completely false. The individual in question, Dennis Nilsen, was not even allowed by the British Court to commence an action. Nevertheless, these sections of the press allow the perception to persist that such reports are true.

I appreciate that many people will be reluctant to support an Act which appears to give succour to people like Abu Qutada. However, we have to accept that Human Rights apply equally to those who we do not like or approve of, as well as those we do. The decision, in the Abu Qutada case, that evidence obtained by torture should not be used trials, is a fundamental one which applies to all people who may find themselves before a criminal court.

I hope you agree with me that the Human Rights Act is an existing mechanism which has served the populace well in ensuring basic human rights are observed by those who are in power. There does not seem to be any point in replacing it with another Act, offering the same rights and with the same or very similar methods of redress.

I look forward to hearing from you, and I wish you all the best on May 7th.

Yours sincerely