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The Right Honourable Gordon Brown  
Prime Minister of the United Kingdom

cc:

Jacqui Smith MP, Home Secretary  
Andrew Dismore MP, Chair, Joint Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights  
Trevor Phillips, Chair, Commission for Equality and Human Rights

31 March 2008

RE: The Counter Terrorism Bill

Dear Mr. Prime Minister,

I write as the Secretary General of CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation, an organisation with members in 120 countries which works to strengthen and support civil society around the globe.

I would like to raise our deep concerns about the Counter-Terrorism Bill, which will have its second reading in Parliament tomorrow. If passed, not only will this Bill undermine hard-won human rights and civil liberties, but it will also set a disturbing global example.

The United Kingdom already has the longest period of pre-charge detention in the North at 28 days and this Bill proposes increasing this period by a further fortnight to 42 days. This has been proposed without any evidence that this will improve security and safety, but with considerable indication that human rights and civil liberties are likely to be forfeited.

In addition to the well-documented flaws of the Bill, relating to concentration of power and weak parliamentary and judicial oversight, I write to draw your attention to the impact that such legislation has globally.

This Bill is part of a disturbing roll back on international human rights standards. Since 2001, many states have introduced security legislation and law enforcement measures in the name of safety and security for their populations. However, such efforts have in practice contributed to significant infringements of human rights as many Governments take advantage of this context and intensify their crackdowns on political opponents, advocacy groups and civic activists, subsequently shrinking the space for civil society.

Instead of taking a principled stand to prevent such actions, the UK through legislation and recent practice has increasingly contributed to an erosion of human rights standards. May we remind you that the real test of democracy is not whether we can avoid such actions when all is going well, the real test is whether we can hold true to the valued principles of democracy and human rights in times of difficulty.

2008 marks the 60th anniversary of the groundbreaking Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as the 10th anniversary of the UK's own Human Rights Act. Recognising this, we urge you to provide courageous leadership on how governments can respect, promote and abide by human rights standards while simultaneously protecting their citizens against terrorism.

In considering the Counter-Terrorism Bill tomorrow, we ask that you consider not only the detrimental effect this Bill will have on your own domestic policies, but also how it will impact and influence the actions of other countries around the world, recognising that the actions by long standing democracies in the North have undermined the progress of emerging democracies in the South. We respectfully appeal to you to use this as an opportunity to inspire the protection of human rights, rather than their erosion.

We thank you for considering our concerns and stand ready as CIVICUS to enter into a dialogue with your government around the concerns raised above.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Naidoo', written in a cursive style.

Kumi Naidoo

Secretary General  
CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation