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Dear Eric

PROGRESS ON CASTE DISCRIMINATION

I am writing in response to enquiries I know you have recently made about the Government's work on introducing the new legislation on caste discrimination. I believe Rachel Clark, the Director of the Government Equalities Office, has recently been in touch with you about this, but I wanted to set out the position in more detail.

We are making good progress on the initial steps in our preparatory work. We are aware that legislating – on the basis of limited evidence, in a controversial and sensitive area where even key points are disputed by different groups – carries a serious risk of unintended consequences if we do not get the detail of the legislation right. As part of its statutory remit, the Equalities and Human Rights Commission is also concerned about the effectiveness of the equality and human rights enactments and the likely effect of a proposed change of law.

We have therefore been discussing with the EHRC a proposal that they carry out, or commission, some research into the key aspects of the legislation – in particular the definition and any exceptions. This work would inform the consultation process in a way designed to minimise the risk of contention over even quite basic aspects of caste. This means that we will want to see the results from this piece of work before determining the drafting of the consultation questions. We expect to be in a position to outline the timetable for both the research and the consultation before the summer recess.

I know that whoever carries out the research will certainly want to involve key pro-legislation groups, and other advocates of caste legislation, as well as those that lobbied against the legislation. We are also keen to ensure that the views of stakeholders less familiar with caste issues are heard in the preparation of the legislation. The Parliamentary debates during the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Bill emphasised the need for employers, public authorities and others to get some familiarity with the concept of caste before the law is changed, and also to deal with concerns about increased bureaucracy and to avoid the need for people to register their caste because of the legislation. Together with the consultation process, we would also therefore want to hear from these groups.



As recognised in the Parliamentary debates, the process as a whole, including thorough and proper consultation, will inevitably take some time. However, I hope that this letter, which I am also copying to Lords Deben, Harries and Lester, will show that we are actively taking forward the preparatory steps to the new legislation, while taking account of the Parliamentary debates and the evidence of the NIESR report and other advice on caste and caste discrimination.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Helen Grant', with a stylized, cursive script.

HELEN GRANT

Minister for Women and Equalities
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State