

**War on Want Parliamentary Briefing**

**June 2017**

*War on Want is a registered charity, with over 90 organisational and trade union affiliates, and more than 100,000 individual supporters in the UK. Our vision is a world free from poverty and oppression, based on social justice, equality and human rights for all. Our charitable objectives include relieving global poverty, through working in partnership with people throughout the world, and the promotion of human rights. We have a long history of working with grassroots social movements, trade unions, human rights and workers’ rights organisations across the world to empower people to fight for their rights, a fight that has even more importance given the challenges that are shaping the world today.*

With the only Queen’s Speech for the next two years taking place on Wednesday 21 June focusing on the imminent challenges of Brexit, War on Want believes that it is of paramount importance that the government retains elements of EU law that fundamentally contribute to fighting poverty and inequality, and guaranteeing human rights for all. As the government sets out its priorities, we have the following concerns:

* The government should invest in the wellbeing and future of the country’s people, not continue to impose a dangerous and failed **austerity programme that hurts those most vulnerable and in poverty**.
* That especially in the context of Brexit negotiations, the government must maintain and strengthen **regulations to protect our economy, lives and livelihoods**.
* The government must not roll back on its various national and international commitments and work to to strengthen efforts to **fight against global poverty**.
* Whether subject to EU trade deals or pursuing UK trade deals, we must ensure that **trade empowers countries in the global South** to adopt their own policies to build economies that work for people and for the planet in line with [international commitments](http://indicators.report/targets/17-15/).
* **Climate change** - extreme droughts, floods and forced displacement - are devastating the lives and livelihoods of the most vulnerable in the global South and worsening existing inequalities. The UK must not turn its back on its responsibility to act.

**War on Want recommendations:**

1. **Ensure the highest standards of** **democracy and transparency**: There must be total transparency, scrutiny and accountability around the Great Repeal Bill and Brexit negotiations. This is of particular concern given the absence of concrete legislative proposals in the Great Repeal Bill white paper, and with regard to ‘Henry VIII clauses’. MPs must not grant ministers sweeping powers to change our existing laws without strict time limits or outside of scrutiny from parliament and the British people: what some may perceive as [technical amendments](https://www.ft.com/content/88feffa1-5403-3e3f-8dc6-fbd324789dcf) can be profound policy shifts requiring democratic scrutiny. As a charity we recognise that the input of civil society organisations and groups at the cutting edge of poverty and welfare issues are vital in ensuring the voices of people most negatively impacted by changes in policy are listened to.
2. **Ensure that there is no regression in our commitment to full and immediate realisation of human rights**: While we welcome the confirmation that there are no plans to pull the UK out of the European Convention on Human Rights, we remain concerned that the Great Repeal Bill could be used as a backdoor to remove hard-won human rights laws. We were particularly alarmed to note that the white paper did not include protections held under the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU, which must be incorporated into UK law. The Bill itself must explicitly guarantee that it will have no negative impact on our existing human rights legislation.
3. **The protection of workers’ rights, including** **migrant workers’ rights:** With our long tradition of working on labour rights, we believe it is of fundamental importance that we address what we believe is a deteriorating workers’ rights situation, affecting UK citizens and migrant workers alike: the right to work for everyone must be guaranteed, and there must be no drop off in the rights of all workers in the UK compared to those in the EU, either now or in the future. The UK must live up to its obligations under relevant International Labour Organisation conventions as well as obligations under the Refugee Convention
4. **A progressive trade agenda – for the UK and the rest of the world:** Whether under EU or UK trade deals, trade must not enable the deregulation of social, health and environmental standards, the locked-in privatisation of public services, or sacrifice equality before the law by offering privileged status to foreign investors via investor-state dispute settlement or similar arbitration mechanisms.[[1]](#endnote-1) It is imperative that countries in the global South are permitted to adopt their own trade policies to build economies that work for people and for the planet in line with [international commitments](http://indicators.report/targets/17-15/). All trade negotiations must be fully transparent, with new legislation to replace the inadequate Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010.[[2]](#endnote-2)
5. **Ensure that we can retain our** **public services**: Regardless of what settlement that we reach with the EU, it is of critical importance that the UK does not enter into any agreement which may prevent or [inhibit](http://ec.europa.eu/competition/state_aid/legislation/provisions.html) the ability to maintain and bring services back under public control. War on Want believes that maintaining public services like the NHS is crucial to fighting poverty and ensuring the realisation of human rights. Moreover, we believe this to be a position shared by an [overwhelming majority](https://yougov.co.uk/news/2017/05/19/nationalisation-vs-privatisation-public-view/) of the British public.
6. **Ensure policies that frame Britain’s role in the world prioritise human rights and address the root causes of poverty and inequality:** We must not allow new policies to undermine our global human rights or environmental obligations: instead of selling arms to 22 out of 30 countries on our own human rights watchlist, we must end arms and repressive technologies exports where there is a risk of their use in internal repression or human rights violations. We must also ensure we are doing our [fair share](https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/file_attachments/ib-civil-society-review-climate-indcs-191015-en_2.pdf) in order to meet international climate change obligations to prevent a breach of 1.5c guardrail, while encouraging other states to do the same. In line with this, we must end UK complicity in the corporate plundering of natural resources in the global South, for example through mining that causes social and environmental damage to communities, as well as corporate controlled food production that prevent a sustainable and fair food system. Any new approach to Britain’s role globally must include binding legal and regulatory frameworks to hold companies accountable for their operations overseas.

Political choices made at this crucial time in British politics may have huge implications for efforts to ensure a world free from poverty and oppression, based on social justice, equality and human rights for all.

We urge you to ensure the maximum possible involvement of the British public in the coming months as the government’s legislative and policy agenda is taken forward, while also foregrounding what any changes may mean for the UK’s critical role in working to fight against global poverty.

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1. A recent [European Court of Justice ruling](http://www.waronwant.org/media/court-ru) means that any trade deal including such provisions must be subject to approval in individual EU member states, severely impacting its likelihood of full ratification. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. For more information, see War on Want evidence to the UK-US trade relations inquiry: <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/international-trade-committee/ukus-trade-relations/written/48332.html> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)