



For immediate release – 20 March 2009

## United Kingdom: ARTICLE 19 Lobbies UK Government to Repeal Libel Laws

**ARTICLE 19 has written to the British Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, along with members of the Cabinet and members of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights, to urge an amendment to UK legislation on criminal libel.**

The action is in support of an amendment to the Coroners and Justice Bill due to be brought before the House of Commons by Dr Evan Harris, MP on 23 March 2009.

ARTICLE 19 has consistently called for the repeal of criminal libel in the UK. We believe that, although dormant for a number of years, the continuing presence of these laws is incompatible with basic democratic ideals, as well as international guarantees of freedom of expression.

One of the problems with criminal defamation is that a breach may lead to harsh sanctions, including a criminal record or imprisonment. In some countries, unduly harsh penalties under criminal libel laws are used to suppress the right to freedom of expression. International officials, including the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression and other human rights bodies, have argued that states should impose the least restrictive penalties, using carefully craft civil defamation laws, rather than heavy-handed criminal defamation.

*“ARTICLE 19 believes that the continued presence of criminal libel laws on the UK statute sends a signal to other countries that such laws are acceptable,”* comments Dr Agn s Callamard, ARTICLE 19 Executive Director. *“Repealing what is essentially a ‘dead-letter’ law may help to restore the UK’s reputation in the area of defamation law.”*

### **NOTES TO EDITORS:**

- To see the letter sent to UK Members of Parliament go to: <http://www.article19.org/pdfs/letters/united-kingdom-article-19-lobbies-to-repeal-libel-laws.pdf>
- For more information: please contact Barbora Bukovska, Senior Director for Law at [Barbora@article19.org](mailto:Barbora@article19.org) or +44 20 7278 9292.
- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.

