



Inaugural Meeting Minutes

2:30pm, Monday 30th March 2009 - Committee Room 13

Parliamentary Attendance

- Lord Craig of Radley
- Lord Steyn
- Countess of Mar
- Baroness Stern
- Baroness Howells of St. Davids
- Edward Garnier QC MP

Speakers

- Simon Davies – Director, Privacy International
- Dr Gus Hosein - Senior Fellow, Privacy International

Other Attendance

- David Banisar - Deputy Director, Privacy International
- Mariya-Martina Yalamova - Internet Policy Advisor, Privacy International
- Phil Booth – National Coordinator, NO2ID
- Hratche Koundarjian – Privacy International

Election of Officers

It was proposed and seconded, and approved unanimously that the following members of the Group should hold the following office.

- Edward Garnier QC MP (Conservative) – Chair
- David Heath MP (Liberal Democrat) – Vice Chair
- Lord Peston (Labour) – Vice Chair
- The Earl of Northesk (Conservative) – Vice Chair

Minutes

Edward Garnier QC MP, welcomed those in attendance, and introduced the speakers Simon Davies and Dr. Gus Hosein.

Simon Davies, stated that privacy issues are very much in the public consciousness at the present time, but that nevertheless that the issues dealt with can be complex. He gave a brief overview of Privacy International, that will be providing the secretariat services to the group, and made clear that the organisation has input from hundreds of individuals and organisations from around the world. He highlighted that new technology and its application has meant that policy and decision making are impacting on privacy issues on a



daily basis. He also stated that the Government's plans for communication interception were likely to be topical within the press and that he hoped that this would be a matter that the new Group would examine. He hoped that as the Secretariat for the Group, that Privacy International would be able to bring in expertise from a variety of outside specialism to inform debate within the Group.

Edward Garnier QC MP, stated that he was personally more interested in privacy issues in recent years, particularly during the period of the debating around the ID Card Bill in 2005, and that the impact that this was having around the public losing control of personal data. He stated that the Group would hold the Government to account also after the next election, whatever political persuasion it may be. He made clear that the Group would have to remain watchful of new legislation and policy making.

Lord Craig of Radley, stated that it was surprising that the Group had only just been set up and that there was clearly a need in previous years and asked whether similar groups had existed.

Simon Davies, stated that other groups had touched on privacy issues previously but that no specific group had examined the issue comprehensively.

Edward Garnier QC MP, stated that the Conservative Civil Liberties Group does examine these issues, but that it is not a cross party group.

Gus Hosein, stated that Privacy International had been organising cross party meetings and briefings in parliament since 1999, but that these had been on a purely responsive basis dealing with the legislation at hand.

Simon Davies, made clear that this group would fill the gap in these deficiencies and in particular that bringing in outside expertise would help to increase understanding of the Groups Members. He also stated that he hoped that the Group would look into the impact on privacy of legislations created in Brussels.

The Countess of Mar, said that the Group would prove potentially beneficial by bringing Parliamentarians together in the examination of Bills, where presently they worked in isolation.

Edward Garnier QC MP, complemented that point by stating that recent Government bills had examined a large variety of issues that at times did not relate to the central purpose of the bill, and that as such they may not receive effective scrutiny.

Phil Booth, made the point that it was important that the Group was able to articulate arguments with clear examples which would serve to illustrate the points being made and remove some of the abstract nature of the debate around privacy.



Edward Garnier QC MP, emphasised that in recent years more power had passed into the hands of Ministers in relation to personal data. He also stated that there were an increasing number of non-state actors that provided some sort of civil function and that because of this there were privy to personal information collected by the Government.

Baroness Mar, made clear that there had been increased incursion on personal privacy in recent years, and that she hoped that the Group would act to keep the Government accountable and a useful source of information. She also recommended that the Group consider itself the equivalent of the ‘canary in the mine’ that can foresee the impending dangers while few others are noticing.

Simon Davies, agreed and said that he hoped that the Group would act have an early warning function, and that the group could play an important role in acting as an independent committee in examination of a variety of issues.

Edward Garnier QC MP, said that the Groups would hopefully better inform debates in both houses and draw in further Parliamentary member.

Lord Craig of Radley, stated that he hoped the group would arm parliamentarians with better arguments with which to rebut calls for further intrusions into Privacy.

Gus Hosein, stated that in an international context the British example of the introduction of biometric ID cards was used as an argument by countries with a poor human rights record as a rationale to proceed with their proposals. Similarly, the DNA database was being used as an example within Malaysia, and Britain and Europe’s communications surveillance regime was being promoted within the United States. It is therefore imperative that the UK not act as a bad example in this domain, and so this only raises the importance of the work of this group.

The Countess of Mar, raised the example of a NHS Trust who had been found to have had tens of thousands of ‘illegal incursions’ into its patients database, and she stated that she had raised this matter with the Secretary of State.

Edward Garnier QC MP, made clear that he had less and less confidence in Government data retention or in its role as the protectorate of personal information. He also stated that there was a need for further debate in both houses in these issues. He thanked those present for their attendance and brought the meeting to a close.

Meeting Ends – 15:13