



global witness

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Parliamentary committee report on libel, privacy and press freedom not strong enough to defend public interest reporting, say campaigners

A report by the Culture, Media and Sport committee on press standards, privacy and libel makes broadly sensible recommendations but does not go far enough to allay well-founded fears that England's laws are a barrier to public-interest campaigning by non-governmental organisations (NGOs), said Global Witness today.

Global Witness investigates natural resource-related conflict and corruption, publishing reports which it then uses as evidence to campaign for change. Director Charmian Gooch gave evidence to the Committee, including on past legal actions taken against the group. In spite of this, the final report does not adequately reflect the different circumstances and constraints faced by NGOs as opposed to the media.

"The tone and direction of this report is broadly welcome, and some of the specific recommendations are good, however it will be a challenge to make sure that the Government can follow up on the many recommended consultations. We face threats on a regular basis and so had hoped for more concrete recommendations to protect campaigning organisations working on public interest issues," said Gooch.

Specific recommendations welcomed by Global Witness include: additional hurdles for libel tourism claimants; the one year limitation period for internet publications; the proposal to reverse the burden of proof onto companies bringing defamation actions; and recommendations which support big reductions in the Conditional Fee Agreements.

"The decision not to recommend mandatory pre-notification is welcome, however we are concerned that the 'public interest' test is not clearly defined and may enable corrupt dictators to obstruct our exposés into their dirty dealings. The sort of responsible, fact based campaigning we do is under threat, and this report does not do enough to redress that. Without further concrete reform, some of the world's most egregious individuals will still be able to exploit the justice system to launder their reputations and defend their continuing corrupt activity," said Gooch.

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Notes:

- The report was published on 00:01 Wednesday 24 February. Embargoed copies were made available to witnesses and the media in advance.
- [More on Global Witness's position UK libel laws](#)
- [Global Witness submission to the Select Committee](#)
- In July 2007 the son of the President of the Republic of Congo used privacy laws to try and force Global Witness to remove documents from our website which showed that he had been using state oil revenues to fund his lavish personal lifestyle. [Find out more](#)
- Charmian Gooch is available for interview