

Sent Electronically

Mr. Alex Chalk KC MP, Secretary of State for Justice

Rt. Hon. Rishi Sunak MP, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom

Rt. Hon. Lucy Frazer KC MP, Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

Rt. Hon. James Cleverly MP, Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs

Ms. Shabana Mahmood MP, Shadow Labour Secretary of State for Justice

Rt. Hon. Alistair Carmichael MP, Liberal Democrat Spokesperson for Home Affairs, Justice and Northern Ireland

Mr. Chris Stephens MP, Shadow SNP Spokesperson (Justice)

Mr. Paul Philip, Chief Executive, Solicitors Regulation Authority

Mr. Mark Neale, Director-General, The Bar Standards Board

Mr. Matthew Hill, Chief Executive, Legal Services Board

Ms. Dunja Mijatović, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights

Ms. Teresa Ribeiro, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Representative on Freedom of the Media

Ms. Irene Khan, United Nations Special Rapporteur on on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression

20 September 2023

Dear Alex Chalk KC MP,

We call on you to include an Anti-SLAPP law in the King's Speech

We joined the UK Anti-SLAPP Coalition in welcoming the UK Government's commitment to address Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs) and their impact on the British justice system. However, we remain concerned by the lack of meaningful progress since the announcement in July 2022. The inclusion of a commitment in the forthcoming King's Speech to bring forward a standalone Anti-SLAPP Bill will be an unequivocal statement that the UK Government is committed to stamp out SLAPPs.

We support the anti-SLAPP amendment to the [Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Bill](#) as a significant step in the right direction to protect public interest reporting on economic crime. As an important part of the global financial system, it is vital that the UK ensures journalists and public watchdogs are able to continue their work without risking legal harassment. However, this amendment does not go far enough as it only covers claims relating to the "public interest in protecting society from economic crimes". It also introduces an unnecessary element of uncertainty by making the operation of the law contingent on the belief of the defendant and the perceived purpose of the filer. The [Government itself](#) has acknowledged the current amendment as "the first step in cracking down on SLAPPs used to limit freedom of speech," not the full realisation of its commitment.

Therefore, the next step must be a standalone Anti-SLAPP Bill to extend protections to everyone who speaks out in the public interest. The UK Anti-SLAPP Coalition has demonstrated how this can be done with their [Model Law](#) which we shared with your office last year. As a result, there is no reason why a standalone Anti-SLAPP Bill shouldn't be

included in the King's Speech. Only with the fulfilment of a universally applicable law will the Government's commitment be realised.

Many of the cases that have been monitored by the Coalition would have been unaffected by the proposed amendment. This includes the legal threat from the Russian warlord Yevgeny Prigozhin against Bellingcat founder [Eliot Higgins](#), ENRC's SLAPP action against journalist and author [Tom Burgis](#) and the defamation action brought against [Nina Cresswell](#) by her abuser after she bravely spoke out to protect other women, to name but a few. Cases like these demonstrate the need for an anti-SLAPP bill that protects everyone speaking out.

The Government will, in its own words, "set out further legislation beyond economic crime when parliamentary time allows." This can only happen if an Anti-SLAPP Bill is included in the King's Speech, which will outline the Government's programme of work in the coming Parliamentary session. This would be the last opportunity to realise the commitment before the expected general election.

Addressing this issue has broad public and political support and represents a significant opportunity to protect free speech and shield British courts from abuse.

Kind regards,

Rachel Corp, CEO, ITN

Alison Phillips, Editor, The Mirror

Chris Evans, Editor, The Telegraph

Katharine Viner, Editor-in-Chief, The Guardian

Victoria Newton, Editor-in-Chief, The Sun

Paul Webster, Editor, The Observer

Roula Khalaf, Editor, The Financial Times

Tony Gallagher, Editor, The Times

Ben Taylor, Editor, The Sunday Times

John Micklethwait, Editor-in-Chief, Bloomberg

Ian Hislop, Editor, Private Eye

Alan Rusbridger, Editor, Prospect Magazine

Zanny Minton Beddoes, Editor-in-Chief, The Economist

Julian Richards, Managing Editor, openDemocracy

Oliver Duff, Editor-in-Chief, i

Rozina Breen, CEO, The Bureau of Investigative Journalism (TBIJ)

Drew Sullivan, Co-Founder, Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP)

Paul Radu, Co-Founder, OCCRP

Eliot Higgins, Founder, Bellingcat

James Harding, Founder & Editor, Tortoise

Franz Wild, Editor, TBIJ

Joanna Prior, CEO, Pan Macmillan

Arabella Pike, Publishing Director, HarperCollins UK

Dan Conway, CEO, Publishers Association

José Borghino, Secretary General, International Publishers Association

Michelle Stanistreet, General Secretary, National Union of Journalists (NUJ)

Sayra Tekin, Director of Legal, News Media Association (NMA)

Dawn Alford, Executive Director, Society of Editors
Gill Phillips, Editorial Legal Consultant, Guardian News & Media
Pia Sarma, Editorial Legal Director, Times Newspapers Ltd
Adam Cannon, Director of Legal, NGN
Sarah Baxter, Director, Marie Colvin Center for International Reporting
Rachel Oldroyd, Deputy Investigations Editor, The Guardian
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Paul Caruana Galizia, Reporter, Tortoise
Oliver Bullough, Journalist and author
Peter Geoghegan, Journalist and author
Carole Cadwalladr, Journalist, The Observer
Catherine Belton, Journalist and author of *Putin's People: How the KGB took back Russia and then took on the west*
Richard Brooks, journalist, Private Eye
Meirion Jones, investigative journalist
Sean O'Neill, Senior Writer, The Times
George Greenwood, Investigations Reporter, The Times
Clare Rewcastle Brown, Investigative Journalist and Founder, The Sarawak Report
Nina Cresswell, Writer and journalist
Matthew Caruana Galizia, Director, The Daphne Caruana Galizia Foundation
Jodie Ginsberg, President, Committee to Protect Journalists
Alexander Papachristou, Executive Director, Cyrus R. Vance Center for International Justice
Zelda Perkins, Co-Founder, Can't Buy My Silence campaign to ban the misuse of NDAs
Dr Julie Macfarlane, Co-Founder, Can't Buy My Silence campaign to ban the misuse of NDAs
James Nixey, Director, Russia and Eurasia Programme, Chatham House
Edward Lucas, Author, European and transatlantic security consultant and fellow at the Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA)
John Heathershaw, Professor of International Relations, University of Exeter
Dr Tena Prelec, Research Associate, LSEE Research on SEE, LSE
Dr Peter Coe, Associate Professor in Law, Birmingham Law School, University of Birmingham
Thomas Mayne, Research Fellow, University of Oxford