

The Sex Offenders Register

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As a (wrongly) convicted sex offender I was featured above the Times coverage and I must praise the leader editorial which commented that it is surely everybody's human right to be able to request removal from a restrictive register.

As it happens I am innocent of my convictions and the appeal process is still continuing. But the Sex Offender Register poses very little problem for me; I simply notify police if I'm going abroad and give officers tea and biscuits once a year when they pop round to check I'm still living at home. I can understand how it can affect the lives of those who want to work with children or the vulnerable but it has little impact on my life.

Even if my appeal fails I would not stand a chance of having my name removed - I would have to show that my behaviour has changed; since I did not offend in reality in the first place, my behaviour has not changed. I'm not offending now either.

Conviction needs no evidence - it can be and was, in my case, one person's word against another's. The main reason for the absurdity of the Sex Offenders Register is that it simply doesn't work. Most actual sex offenders would never have been on a register. They are family members or friends. The time and expense of keeping tags on 35,000 people is enormous. Police universally say that would be better spent preventing abuse or tracking down criminals.

If registers worked, the far greater re-offending rate amongst burglars or muggers or drug pushers would make registers for them much more effective. But you don't hear police asking for them. They know the paperwork and cost involved would prevent time and effort being devoted to far more important areas of policing.

The enormous quantity of generally unreported false allegations brought to court illustrates that there are many reasons for inventing or inflating a claim. From a desire for revenge to a misunderstanding provoked by alcohol or drug use, from greed for compensation cash to a need for sympathy, there are dozens of convictions a month in the courts and the implication is that there must be hundreds more which were never exposed and resulted in wrongful convictions for innocent people.

I get loads of letters inspired by my regular columns in Inside Time, the prisoner's newspaper, from innocent victims of false accusations currently serving time in prison. Every one of them will carry the mark of Cain for the rest of their lives - yet all that happened was that the courts got it wrong. It does happen, you know.

In our current social climate of simplistic slogan morality, it's easy to understand Government Ministers wanting to appeal to tabloid readers and headline thinkers.

The rejection of Human Rights seems ironic when featured next to stories supporting protests in countries from citizens wanting their human rights. On the one hand we condemn the attitude of countries like Iran; on the other we howl that we should only apply human rights to people we decide deserve them. Like in Iran.

I actually believe the repercussions of instant remedies like the Sex Offenders Register allow more abuse instead of preventing it.

Which, of course, satisfies the agenda of much of the media.

It's a hell of a story.