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Press Association Newsfile

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UK **PHONE-TAP LAWS** 'BREACH HUMAN RIGHTS'

BYLINE: Geoff Meade, PA Europe Editor, in Brussels**SECTION:** HOME NEWS**LENGTH:** 265 words

Government phone-tapping laws were condemned today as a breach of human rights at the end of a nine-year legal battle over privacy.

The European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg said surveillance procedures under the 1985 Interception of Communications Act provided inadequate protection against abuses of power.

The Act was replaced by the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act in 2000, but civil rights campaigners who brought the case in 1999 called today for another review of the rules.

UK civil rights group Liberty said the Government must now review the Act.

Liberty's legal officer, Alex Gask, said: ``The Court of Human Rights has rightly found that greater accessibility and accountability is required to ensure respect for the privacy of thousands of innocent people.

``While secret surveillance is a valuable tool, the mechanisms for intercepting our telephone calls and emails should be as open and accountable as possible, and should ensure proportionate use of very wide powers."

Liberty complained to the court alongside the Irish Council for Civil Liberties and British Irish Rights Watch.

Mark Kelly, director of the Irish Council for Civil Liberties, commented: ``The Court has found that the UK's relatively sophisticated rules on data interception have failed to prevent unlawful interference