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Cleverly Breaks from Badenoch on ECHR and Keeps Leadership Hopes Alive

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— Categories: Human Rights



Sir James Cleverly has signalled a clear difference in direction from fellow Conservative MP Kemi Badenoch over the future of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), saying he is not convinced leaving the treaty would solve the challenges the UK faces. The former Foreign and Home Secretary also kept the door open to another tilt at the Conservative leadership, but insisted now is not the time for personal ambition.

In a speech at the Institute for Public Policy, Sir James attacked the idea that withdrawing from the ECHR would provide a quick solution to issues the party has been grappling with in

recent years. His comments directly contrasted with those of Badenoch, who launched a review into the U.K.'s membership of the treaty and argued that leaving may be necessary. Sir James struck a more cautious tone, questioning the value of such a move and pointing instead to other underlying challenges.

“I’m not convinced the ECHR is, on its own, a silver bullet,” he told attendees. “Other countries signed up to the same treaty seem to manage far better, so perhaps the answers lie elsewhere.”

His intervention has added further complexity to the Conservative Party’s internal debate over its legal and constitutional direction following the recent election.

Leadership Speculation

The Braintree MP also addressed questions about his political future, refusing to rule out another bid for the Conservative Party leadership. Though he remained guarded, Sir James clarified that he is not retreating from frontline politics.

“I like being in government. I don’t like being in opposition,” he said. “I’ll play my part in helping the Conservatives get back into government, at every level. But I’ve also promised myself I won’t jump at the first opportunity.”

Sir James reflected on the party’s troubled record of leadership changes in recent years, noting, “We tried that a number of times in the last government and it didn’t end well.” His remarks suggest a desire for stability and long-term thinking as the party seeks to rebuild trust with voters.

He also argued that voters will eventually judge Reform and others on their performance, not just their promises. “If they don’t step up and deliver, the public will respond, and that’s where we come in. We have to be a credible alternative again, with direction, purpose, and energy.” Whether he chooses to run again or not, he intends to play a key role in shaping the party’s future.