

Just News

Human Rights in Northern Ireland

A rose by any other name...?

Readers could be forgiven for thinking that an Attenuated Energy Projectile (AEP) is the latest new sports drink, but before you rush to the cooler cabinet in your local shop to seek it out, your search will be in vain. The AEP will instead be found in the ever-increasing arsenal of police weaponry. It is in fact the so-called "replacement" for the plastic bullet which was approved by the NI Policing Board earlier this month.

Plastic bullets (PBRs) have a long and troubled history in Northern Ireland, their use having resulted in some 17 deaths and hundreds of injuries over the years. It was right and proper, therefore, that the Patten Commission addressed this issue in their consideration of public order policing. Their recommendations were clear:

"an immediate and substantial investment [should] be made in a research programme to find an acceptable, effective and less potentially lethal alternative to the PBR."

(Recommendation 69 - emphasis added).

They further recommended that the police have a broader range of public order equipment at their disposal so that reliance on PBRs would be reduced (rec 70).

In response to these recommendations, the NIO established a Steering Group to research these 'alternatives'. 'Replacements' might have been a more pertinent term of reference to give to this Group, given that this is what they concerned themselves with. It is also questionable whether the research carried out by the Steering Group was as substantial as Patten envisaged, given that the Group itself was NIO appointed and composed solely of those already in the security establishment who had been responsible for previous use and abuse of PBRs, it did not commission any independent medical, scientific or human rights expertise, it did not engage in any meaningful consultation with human rights or other groups with an interest in this debate, and concentrated instead on the technical details of a variety of weapons, including plastic bullets, drawing largely on north American experiences.

CAJ had consistently pointed out the danger that this Group would simply recommend the status quo and would not in engage in any meaningful way in a discussion about the abolition of plastic bullets or the provision of *real*

alternatives for managing public order situations. It seems, unfortunately, that we have been proven right. The new plastic bullet is potentially every bit as lethal as its predecessor. In response to requests to address the particular vulnerability of children (having accounted for 9 out of the 17 deaths), the new plastic bullet guidelines issued in December 2003 merely state that:

"...children should not be targeted unless their actions are presenting an immediate threat to life or serious injury, which cannot otherwise be countered."



These are the exact same circumstances under which adults can be fired upon.

The manner in which the AEP was approved is also a cause for concern. As with the introduction of CS spray, the NI Policing Board chose to make this decision at a private meeting, it did not seek the input of the many NGOs and others campaigning on this issue and to our knowledge did not seek any independent medical or human rights expertise. Meetings in private to discuss and agree upon contentious weapons can hardly be said to be the way forward for policing in Northern Ireland.

In particular this decision making process has meant that the many victims of this weapon have been excluded from the process entirely, it has not engaged the human rights concerns of CAJ and others, and indeed it has disregarded UN recommendations on the abolition of PBRs.

While it is to be warmly welcomed that a PBR has not been fired here in over two years, this fact could also be used to argue the case that they are no longer necessary and their abolition rather than 'replacement' should be the focus.

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Vote Human R

The government finally called an election last month, and once more the airwaves of all nature are filled with messages espousing this or that. Your aerial is secretly crying for mercy. To help you digest some of this, and perhaps gain some perspective, CAJ brings you a review of some of the election briefings, manifestos, and demands from the community and voluntary sector.

Before presenting any useful information, it is important and relevant to note that it was quite different to find any election manifestos per se. Without these, how are we to know the questions that we should be asking with regards to less self-evident particular circumstances? Providing a rubric for consistent questioning can help our organisations and our constituencies apply constant and consistent pressure on aspiring and successful politicians alike.

That being said, there certainly are quite a few opinions and demands coming from groups in the community and voluntary sector in less direct manners. To name a few, Age Concern NI, Amnesty International, Barnardo's and Save the Children, Belfast Carers, and the Children's Law Centre have come out with lists of demands aimed at politicians in the coming election. The demands are of course diverse and represent the constituencies that they serve.

Children

Children's rights are clearly a major issue in this election. The introduction of the ASBO has been one of the biggest recent focal points for children's advocacy groups, and manifestos have made it clear that there is a lot of work to be done in the area of child poverty, access to social services, and the attainment of legal rights. The manifestos from children's groups, present a very clear sense of what Northern Ireland should be asking for in the run-up to the elections, as well as afterwards.

Barnardo's and Save the Children have published an extremely impressive document entitled, "Room for

Improvement: A Manifesto for Children in Northern Ireland" with an excellent amount of research and statistics. The organisations present several lists of demands throughout their 22-page manifesto (www.barnardos.org.uk/orthernireland/NIM.pdf). Pages 19-20 present the comprehensive list, which here is distilled to several crucial points:

- Establish a statutory right to education for children in custody and ensure such education is compatible with the Northern Ireland Curriculum.
- Ensure that every child, without exception, has access to appropriate good quality inclusive public services.
- Introduce robust legislative arrangements for interagency co-operation and information exchange.
- Ensure that combating the sexual exploitation of children is a priority in the Northern Ireland Policing Plan.
- Ensure that families have a guaranteed minimum income, calculated on the basis of the real costs of nurturing children in a safe and healthy home.
- Set out how resources will be targeted to reach those least likely to be lifted out of poverty, such as large families and families with disabled children and parents.
- Increase the minimum wage for 16-17 year-olds to the same amount that is paid to those aged 18-21.

The Children's Law Centre (www.childrenslawcentre.org) offers in their "Election Briefing on Children's Rights Issues," many common demands to Barnardo's. In addition they request:

- The establishment of effective and inclusive mechanisms for seeking children and young people's input on policies and decisions.
- The elimination of physical punishment as it constitutes legalized child abuse.
- The inclusion of legislative mechanisms in the Bill of Rights to protect children's rights.
- The identification and prevention of bullying against marginalized and minority ethnic groups in schools.
- Educating children of all ages about their rights.

The Centre's focus on legal practices with regards to children is also based heavily on the UNCRC, and seeks its full implementation as a first step towards progress in fighting poverty and deprivation among children of all groups in Northern Ireland.

Over all the children's organisations offer a very cohesive set of demands for securing a better future for our children. Their focus on rights, protection, and education are demands that voters must bring to politicians before and after the elections. Clearly these organisations feel that there is much work to be done in this area, and some are making their demands clear and highly accessible with very slick professional publications easily found on their websites.

Adults

Even with such a focus on children's rights, there is still plenty of room left for other organisations' issues. Amnesty International, Age Concern NI, and the Belfast Carers Centre all put out their concerns and demands for members to review and question candidates.

Amnesty International NI (www.amnesty.org.uk/NI) presents for the new government a list of six key demands relating to its traditional areas of focus, as well as some tailored more specifically to Northern Ireland.

Rights and Equality!

- Work towards an international arms trade treaty.
- Develop a strategy to stop violence against women.
- End detention without trial in the name of security.
- Introduce stronger rules to hold companies to account.
- End the arbitrary detention of asylum seekers.
- Introduce legislation to enable a strong and inclusive Bill of Rights.

They request their members and other interested parties to inquire to candidates about these objectives, and demand explanations of how the candidates intend to secure these rights.

Belfast Carers Centre published a list of questions in its latest newsletter for supporters to ask candidates (www.carerscentre.org/documents/Middlepages34.doc):

- What will your party do to support structures to end carer poverty?
- What will your party do to better support carers' health?
- What will your party do to give carers' better protection and opportunity in the work place?
- How would your party actively support an end to the social isolation and exclusion faced by so many carers?
- What steps will your party take to ensure that there is much better recognition of the role carers makes?

The sheet is placed in the middle of the Centre's monthly magazine and is an easy tear-out piece for people to take to forums and debates. It gives the organisation an easy and consistent way to challenge candidates with their concerns.

A group with some related concerns is Age Concern Northern Ireland. They have an extensive manifesto (<http://www.ageconcernni.org/pages/agenda.pdf>). Some of the key points and defining positions are as follows:

- Greater funding for mental and physical health research and treatment.
- Better transitional housing options for the elderly who cannot remain independent.
- Invest time and money through reducing environment 'barriers' through consultation and smart planning.
- To restore the link between pensions and average earnings.
- To ensure the security of older people's finances through government regulation.

Finally, as well developing an extensive manifesto, NICVA hosted an event to allow members of the community and voluntary sector as well as developing an extensive manifesto to question candidates in a panel discussion.

The focus of this discussion ranged widely and included:

- How will the candidates help to prevent organisations in the community and voluntary sector from folding?
- How will parties work to include more women in politics?
- In what ways could Belfast be a healthier and safer city to live in?
- What will parties do to bring forward a strong and inclusive Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland?

Conclusions

In this election, there are many organisations with large constituencies seeking greater equality and rights protection from the government. An important part of securing these rights is to make sure that these demands are made public and reiterated constantly. The organisations reviewed here have done this to the extent that they can by providing various forms of their demands to their supporters as well as to any interested member of the public.

Though their techniques range greatly from short synopses to fifty page manuals, the important messages are always reduced to a list of straight forward demands that are approachable for voters and politicians alike. Hopefully candidates will keep these requests in mind as they begin to implement their policies.

As regards the creation and accessibility of manifestos, I it is surprising that such a few organizations have any references at all to the election on their website. If human rights are indeed an important issue in this election, then they must be treated and presented as such. Though clearly many smaller organisations have little time to create manifestos, they do not have to be a long drawn out document, but a succinct statement of aspirations and goals for the new government. Organising on this individual level is crucial for the attainment of our demands for equality, and this is just a tiny step on the way.

Graham Bass
Earlham College intern

District Policing

CAJ is this month publishing its second major Commentary on the new policing institutions – this one on the work of the District Policing Partnerships. The first Commentary in the series addressed the work of the Policing Board (see www.caj.org.uk), and a third one – looking at the Office of the Police Ombudsman - is in the final stages of production.

The District Policing Partnerships were considered an important building block in the Patten blueprint for policing change. The Commission had emphasised the importance of *“the police working in partnership with the community; the community thereby participating in its own policing; and the two working together, mobilising resources to solve problems affecting public safety over the longer term rather than the police, alone, reacting short term to incidents as they occur”* (Patten, para 7.3). In reality, however, in the course of the translation of this vision into legislative reality, some important but fundamental changes were made. The changes tended to undermine rather than strengthen the role of local accountability mechanisms.

Government, for example, decided not to accept Patten’s proposals that District Councils raise money from rates to give to District Policing Partnerships for work on community police problems. But they did create Community Safety Partnerships (on the basis of the Criminal Justice Review) which brought together the statutory sector and the local police, were given their own budget for community safety initiatives, and had limited local democratic accountability. While some DPPs and CSPs liaise closely at local level, others do not, and there appears to be no routine coordination between the two kinds of bodies working on similar local issues, leading to a confusing “two-track” process.

Patten intended that the DPPs would create a local focus point which would be “advisory, explanatory, consultative...represent the consumer, voice the concerns of citizens, and monitor the performance of the police in their districts”. Patten’s vision for DPPs was that of a local entity, with a broad remit, representative of the community as a whole, and playing a leadership role locally on issues of policing. The focus was to be on ‘policing’, not on ‘the police’ per se. So, the question now is, how much is that vision being delivered in practice?

CAJ’s Commentary seeks to give a snapshot of the current situation - what is working and what problems have arisen in this settling-in phase. The Commentary may well prove very timely, since the Policing Board has established a review group to look at the work of the DPPs. CAJ is unaware of the extent to which this review has sought the

input of others (non-governmental groups, community organisations, sectoral groups, church-people, local businesses etc). The initiative certainly provides the Policing Board with an opportunity to reach out beyond the DPPs themselves to others who may have useful insights into communities and the ways they are policed (or not policed). Hopefully, this Commentary will be of value in that regard.

The Policing Board and DPPs

The Commentary starts with a discussion of the relationship between the Policing Board and DPPs. We highlight the problems reported back to us by various DPP members and urge the Board as a first step to carry out a training audit to identify the generic and specialised training needs of DPP members and staff. A detailed training programme needs to be put in place for all DPP members as soon as possible.

The problem, however, is not merely one of training. DPPs clearly need a lot of practical support from the Board. At a conference CAJ organised on the topic in June 2004, DPP members voiced the need for the Board to increase public awareness of the DPPs, and especially of the fact that DPPs are independent both of the police and the Policing Board. Many thought that it would be helpful to hold regular meetings for DPP members to discuss best practice, identify training needs and share information; they urged that the Board provide guidance on the roles, duties, and powers of DPPs, and the relationship between DPPs and other policing institutions. In particular, they asked that the Board give unequivocal guidance when problems arise which need to be handled consistently across all DPPs.

The PSNI and DPPs

The Commentary also touches on the ideal relationship between the DPPs and the Police Service of Northern Ireland. It is clear from the feedback that many DPP members feel they would benefit from more training in good meeting practice, particularly with a view to assisting them hold the police effectively to account. Holding the police (or any institution) to account requires a level of skills which need to be honed through practice – asking probing questions, learning how to evaluate the answers received, understanding the context the police operates within so as to better understand the strengths and weaknesses of action or inaction etc.. The Board could help the DPPs acquire the necessary skills to more effectively carry out this scrutiny role. Moreover, the Board and the DPP network could usefully consider how to assist the police respond effectively to the demands of local accountability. Police reports that

g Partnerships

inform rather than obscure what is happening locally; an open-minded attitude to practical suggestions and ideas coming from DPP members; and a willingness to work collaboratively with the wider community at the instigation of the DPP, are all part of creating good local community-police relationships.

Community outreach and DPPs

Clearly DPPs can only be truly effective if they reflect the concerns of the local community, so a third area of recommendations in CAJ's Commentary concerns the relationship between the DPP and the general public. Many DPP members attending CAJ's June 2004 conference indicated real worries about the extent and nature of public participation in the work of the DPP. Too few people attend the meetings; the procedures for participating in debate are too formalistic; and there is no sense of real engagement on the part of the local community. It was agreed that DPPs need to review their working relations with the public and ensure that their meetings, outreach efforts, communications strategy, and all their activities are aimed at securing a *"constant dialogue at local levels between the police and the community"* (Patten, para 6.25).

Many present at the conference also raised concerns about the existence of CSP/DPP dualist structures at the local level and many agreed that it would be important to revisit the issue of two distinct local structures relating to policing and community safety. If, despite careful thinking about democratic accountability, efficiency, and the best use of public monies, it is determined to retain two entities, there must at least be clear working protocols between the different bodies. CAJ's Commentary recommends that any such protocols, once finalised, be communicated to all DPP members and monitored by the Policing Board.

Human Rights and DPPs

Obviously of particular importance to CAJ is the extent to which DPPs can be of assistance to the PSNI and the Policing Board in delivering Patten's vision "that the fundamental purpose of policing should be the protection and vindication of the human rights of all". DPPs are extremely well placed to monitor policing at the local level and see how in practice the various human rights training modules, codes of practice, police code of ethics etc, are or are not being translated into everyday policing.

The Policing Board has a Human Rights Adviser who has prepared a template for monitoring PSNI compliance with the Human Rights Act 1998. That Adviser intends to produce regular reports for the Board, but could benefit enormously from input from DPPs regarding local compliance with the agreed standards. The Commentary

recommends that the Policing Board provide specific guidance to DPPs about their role in contributing local information, insights and experiences to assist the Board in monitoring overall PSNI compliance with the Human Rights Act.

Conference proceedings

The Commentary is essentially aimed at commenting on ways in which the work of the DPPs can be improved, but it draws much of these insights from the proceedings of a conference that CAJ organised in June 2004, and the full conference report is also included in the publication. Presentations by Toby Harris of the London Metropolitan Police Authority, Marie Metcalfe of the Dublin Community Policing Project, individual DPP members from Ballymena, Belfast and Lisburn, as well as speakers from the Pat Finucane Centre, and the Policing Board, all figure in the report. The detailed reports of the workshops, which were rich in debate, are not all included, but the Programme of Action drawn up by CAJ – and much of which is outlined above – draws heavily on the workshop notes.

DPP members present were both positive and critical of their experiences to date. Many indicated that they believed that the mere existence of the DPPs should be counted as a success, since the very idea of questioning the police in public is certainly not anything that was dreamed possible in years past in Northern Ireland. Many of those attending believed that the DPPs are not only positive in theory, but that they are delivering practical successes too, and they cited many success stories.

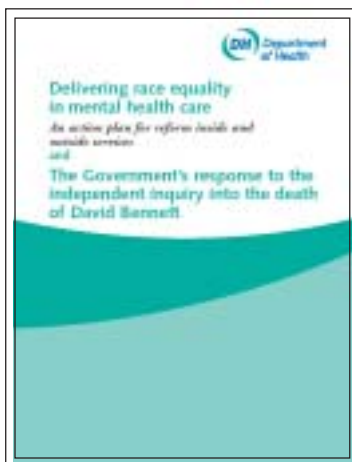
They also however, as should be obvious from the recommendations highlighted above, were very aware of the failings of DPPs, and of the challenges facing them. Several referred explicitly to the problems of their lack of representativeness – the absence of Sinn Fein members, the lack of working class members, and the fact that women are under-represented amongst the political members on DPPs. A number referred to the tensions between party political and independent members. Other DPP members were even more critical, wondering aloud about their ability to date to really change policing on the ground, and they were genuinely questioning the DPPs ability to 'deliver'. The conference suggested developing clearer evaluation mechanisms to monitor what does and does not work, so that the DPPs could adapt their working methods and structures accordingly.

As noted earlier, we are in the 'early days' of the existence of DPPs. Hopefully this Commentary will be of value to those wanting to ensure greater local police accountability. Copies of the full text are available from CAJ at the cost of £ 5.00.

Delivering Race Equality in mental health care

The English Department of Health has recently issued a document which includes two key reports, 'Delivering race equality in mental health care – an action plan for reform inside and outside services' and 'The Government's response to the independent inquiry into the death of David Bennett'. The two reports are published together to make it easier for readers to see the full picture when assessing the Department's approach to ending discrimination.

Achieving race equality in mental health services has been highlighted as a key issue in England for a number of years and the death of David Bennett focused public attention on the problems in the system. Mr Bennett was an African-Caribbean man who was a patient in a psychiatric hospital who died after being restrained by staff. The inquiry showed that racial harassment contributed directly to events leading to his death. More generally, there is evidence of inequality in mental health treatment and outcome for people from Black and Minority Ethnic groups. The Department accepts that in mental health services in England there is both direct and indirect racial discrimination.



The Department's programme of action is based on three 'building blocks': more appropriate and responsive services, community engagement and better information. In particular, action will include the development of a more culturally diverse and capable workforce, the recruitment of community development workers as a new type of NHS

professional and a regular census of mental health patients. Black and Minority Ethnic status includes people of Irish origin living in England.

The aim is that by 2010 there will be, among other outcomes, less fear of mental health services among Black and Minority Ethnic communities, a reduction in the disproportionate rates of compulsory detention of people from these communities in in-patient psychiatric units and the prevention of deaths in mental health services following physical intervention.

One of the particular recommendations of the David Bennett inquiry is that no patient should be restrained in a

prone position for a longer period than three minutes. The Department does not respond specifically to the time limit point but commits itself to new guidance on the management of aggression which includes physical intervention for the shortest period of time necessary.

The challenge for mental health services will be to make the changes necessary to eradicate discrimination. There is an emphasis on collecting information and monitoring service and treatment decisions, which is essential, however the real difference will be made by follow up action. The outcomes will be the markers of success.

In Northern Ireland there are concerns that similar problems exist in our system and that we need to find solutions that will work here. The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety has set up a comprehensive Review of Mental Health and Learning Disability which is aiming to report in full by the end of 2005. In light of this, policy submissions on tackling race discrimination and also on the wider issue of physical restraint, perhaps drawing on these two reports, would be timely.

Maura McCallion

"Delivering race equality in mental health care – an action plan for reform inside and outside services' and 'The Government's response to the independent inquiry into the death of David Bennett", Department of Health, 11 January 2005.

■ Masters (LLM) in Human Rights Law

The University of Ulster's Transitional Justice Institute (TJI) in conjunction with the School of Law at both the Jordanstown and Magee campuses offer this program as a Full time (3 semesters) and a Part-time (6 semesters) course. The program will begin in September of each academic year. For further information see:

www.transitionaljustice.ulster.ac.uk

■ Ph.D. & M.Phil. in Reconciliation Studies

The Irish School of Ecumenics (ISE), an academic institute of Trinity College Dublin, offer three taught Master courses in the reconciliation field. The M.Phil. in *Reconciliation Studies* is taught in Belfast. The courses *International Peace Studies* and *Ecumenical Studies* are offered in Dublin. As a centre for reconciliation studies, since 1970 ISE has promoted research and education in the field of ecumenism, peace and justice in an interdenominational context. For further requests contact ISE at the following address:

www.tcd.ie/ise
reconsec@tcd.ie

Lifting a Dark Cloud

"On 6 November 1971 British Army Green Jackets entered the Creggan neighbourhood to search a house on Rathlin Drive. As they were leaving the street empty-handed, a soldier fired 8 rounds. Two of those rounds were aimed at the backyard of 129 Rathlin Drive, and one was responsible for the death of Kathleen Thompson, mother of six."

Kathleen Thompson is not a statistic. She does not qualify for that status. She is not a missing person and her case is not considered unsolved. The film 'Lifting a Dark Cloud' by Anne Crilly explores the case, "weaving a tapestry of memories to see what happened." Each of the surviving members is interviewed separately and their memories are brought together to give a passionate account of the events of that night.

According to Crilly, one of the most important reasons for making the film was to "facilitate the family to tell their story," because prior to the film, the surviving children had not discussed the death of their mother since she died that night 34 years ago. In a question and answer session following the movie, three of the now grown children discussed the movie, the night, and their legal battles. They all agreed that an important purpose of the film was to bring light and attention to the cases of other victims of uninvestigated deaths. They also expressed their desire for the truth, and for acknowledgement by the British government of her wrongful death.

The film is constructed in a very powerful way. Each of the children was interviewed separately and then their recollections of the night were pieced together to create a very powerful collage. They noted that they had felt uncertain of some facts, but upon seeing the completed film, were surprised at how accurate some of their memories were in relation to others' memories. The final version of the film presents a story that even the family did not know until its completion a year ago. Now the family, in conjunction with producers at the Pat Finucane Centre, are trying to spread their call for justice and accountability by the showing of this film.

This goal it seems is as hard as ever to achieve. It is hoped that this film will provide leverage to ensure a full investigation, and garner acknowledgement by the British government of wrongdoing, an essential piece of information for the family to achieve closure in their 34-year struggle for the truth. Even with the European Court of Human Rights judgements on the need for investigations to comply with Art. 2 of the ECHR, the family has hit roadblocks in the judicial system in their fight for a full investigation. When pressured by the family to reveal what actions would be taken to adhere to the court ruling, the family received this response according to the Pat Finucane Centre's press release for the film.

"In a letter dated March 26, 2001 the Compensation Agency informed the family that compensation of £84.07 was paid to the family in June 1980. Mr. Thompson, husband of the victim, tore up the cheque."

The family members noted that this sum was scarcely one third of the cost to bury their mother.

Contrary to domestic and international law, the case remains officially uninvestigated, not to mention largely ignored by the press as well as the courts. The Thompson family are not unique in this situation either, which brings to surface an important issue that is too often forgotten: that until all victims of violence know the truth, it will be impossible for Northern Ireland to move forward. It is not vengeance they seek. As Minty Thompson noted after the movie "we saw what happened to our family, and we do not want to split up another family by sending someone to jail. We just want the truth."

Graham Bass
Earlham College intern

In the Headlines

CAJ holds newspaper clippings
on more than 50 civil liberties and justice issues
(from mid 1987- December 2000).
Copies of these can be purchased from CAJ office.

The clippings are also available for
consultation in the office.

Anyone interested in this service, should phone
(028) 9096 1122.

Civil Liberties Diary

March 2 Government unveiled plans to create a Victims and Survivors Commission for Northern Ireland.

March 3 Shabina Begum won appeal against her Luton school and obtained the right to wear Islamic dress. Lord Justice Brooke found that the school had infringed her right to express her religion.

The Council of Europe has warned the British government that it must take urgent steps to address its failure to effectively investigate a series of controversial security killings over the course of the Troubles. This comes four years after the ECHR ruled that the British government had violated Article 2 of the European Convention because of its failure to conduct an effective investigation into a number of killings.

Police Ombudsman, Nuala O'Loan, offered herself as an intermediary between the PSNI and those who may wish to give evidence against the killers of Robert McCartney but are not prepared to go directly to the police.

March 5 The Children's Commissioner, Nigel Williams, backed residents of Crumlin and promised to help ensure the health of children will not be compromised by a planned new asbestos dump in the town.

March 8 The Sentence Review Commissioners refused the early release of the killer of Pat Finucane. Their assessment was that he may be a danger to the public and reengage in acts of terrorism.

A report commissioned by the Policing Board to monitor PSNI compliance with the Human Rights Act has ordered the PSNI to revise its training in the discharge of

firearms and the use of force. The report also stated that the force appears to be outperforming other forces in its efforts to comply with the Human Rights Act.

Criminal Justice Minister, John Spellar, launched a twelve week public consultation on the introduction of electronic tagging for convicted criminals.

March 10 Joan Harbison, Equality Commission Chief Commissioner has warned people that employ migrant workers that they have responsibilities that stretch beyond the workplace, e.g. they should inform their employees of their rights with regard to medical and social services.

March 11 All remaining foreign terror suspects held in Belmarsh prison and Broadmoor hospital were released after spending three years in jail without trial.

The Policing Board was criticised by MPs over leaks of sensitive information provided to them by the police. The Northern Ireland Affairs Committee says past breaches of confidentiality have eroded trust and confidence in the Board.

A ban on unmarried couples adopting children in Northern Ireland is to be challenged in open court as an infringement of the right to respect for family life as protected by article 8 ECHR. A similar ban no longer applies in England.

Irsih Minister for Justice, McDowell, announced plans to introduce Anti-Social Behaviour Orders.

March 18 Judge Peter Cory wrote to the chairman of a US congressional committee saying the proposed Inquiries Bill by the

British government is unacceptable.

March 22 The Law Society and Bar Council of England and Wales lost their powers to investigate complaints against lawyers. A single complaints body independent of the profession, the Office for Legal Complaints, will handle them from now on.

March 23 A range of domestic and international human rights organisations, including CAJ, have come together to voice concerns over proposed new legislation governing how public inquiries are carried out. They stated "the fundamental problem contained in the Bill is its shift in emphasis towards inquiries established and largely controlled by government ministers."

March 24 A Government survey showed that just 18% of the worst incidents of domestic violence are reported to the police.

March 25 The Policing Board agreed in principle to the use of new plastic bullets. Their approval was subject to the Chief Constable consulting all relevant bodies before a final decision.

Compiled by Mark Bassett from various newspapers.



Just News welcomes readers' news, views and comments.

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