

# Just News

Human Rights in Northern Ireland

## St Patrick's Day in the US

**St Patrick's Day presents a consistent opportunity to visit the United States and ensure that key policy makers are updated and kept informed of latest developments in the peace process here. The feeling that everything is 'sorted' and nothing now remains to be done can easily take hold if the opportunity is not regularly taken to re-focus attention on outstanding human rights issues.**

The key platform for CAJ's concerns was the holding of Congressional Hearings under the chairmanship of Congressman Chris Smith on the topic of "The Northern Ireland Peace Process: Policing Advances and Remaining Challenges". Chris Smith has a long-standing commitment to international (and indeed domestic) human rights issues, and has a particular interest in developments here. He personally met Rosemary Nelson before her tragic murder when she testified before earlier Hearings he had organised, and this personal exposure to the consequences of the conflict in Northern Ireland has ensured a continued interest in policing on his part.

First to appear before the Committee on International Relations (Subcommittee on Europe and Emerging Threats) was Ambassador Mitchell Reiss. As President Bush's Special Adviser on Northern Ireland he gave an update on political developments. He reported on the fact that he consistently asks the authorities about progress – or lack of same – in relation to the case of Pat Finucane, and indeed he had met that very morning in Washington with Geraldine and John Finucane.

The second panel before the Committee consisted of Policing Board chair Professor Des Rea and outgoing vice-chair Denis Bradley. They were accompanied at the Hearings by three other members of the Policing Board (and staff) and gave a succinct account of the work of the Board since its establishment. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly Denis Bradley indicated that collusion was a widely accepted reality at least within his own (nationalist) community, and he queried the value in focusing too much on these sorts of abuses which – he implied - routinely occur at times of grave violent conflict. This assertion at least made it easier for the non-governmental panel which followed on to focus more on the measures needed to combat collusion, rather than spend a lot of a very limited time-slot on evidencing the fact of collusion.

On other issues, however, the deputy chair was more dismissive of the concerns that the following panellists were scheduled to address. Mr Bradley implied that concerns around the police bugging of a lawyer's interview with a client, and media reports of sectarian murderers being retained even post-conviction as Special Branch informers, would prove less worrying once the real facts emerged. It will certainly be interesting in due course to see if this complacency proves to have been well-founded.

The final panel consisted of British Irish Rights Watch, Human Rights First and CAJ. As three organisations that have worked together over many years on related issues, we liaised beforehand to ensure that we could make submissions that complemented and did not needlessly replicate each other. Accordingly, BIRW focused on the work of the Historical Enquiries Team and updated Congress on their work to date. While recognising that the HET's focus is on police investigations and evidential leads, and cannot therefore hope to be a comprehensive response to the legacy of the past, BIRW emphasised the family-focused nature of the approach being taken. Some of the concerns raised by NGOs previously before Congress about the independence of the team have been addressed, but there clearly remain serious reservations regarding the extent to which the HET can meet the variety and complexity of the expectations placed in it.

Human Rights First (formerly the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights) built upon this testimony by addressing the human rights concerns particular to the Inquiries Act, and the impact of these concerns on plans for the four Cory inquiries. Special attention was paid to reporting on the judicial review currently underway by David Wright into the

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decision by the Secretary of State to convert the inquiry into his son's death into an inquiry under the Inquiries Act. The potential limitations on the powers of the inquiry panel, once conversion is implemented, were canvassed fully. HRF also testified about concerns in the Finucane case, which is now the only case of the four Northern Ireland related cases that Judge Cory investigated where no decision has yet been taken to establish an inquiry.

CAJ's testimony also endorsed these concerns: Our written statement (now part of the official Congressional Record) asked, in relation to the Pat Finucane case, why the state was so categorical regarding the national security implications of the murder of this defence lawyer.

*"Surely the state has no national security interest in protecting loyalist paramilitaries? Its concern to protect national security can only be understood if the state itself acted – by commission or omission – in concert with (those) paramilitaries".*

We also welcomed the fact that great efforts had been made in ensuring that policing in Northern Ireland will be held effectively to account, and that in future any risk of collusion should be dramatically minimised. However, we also expressed our concern at the government's intention to transfer responsibility for national security intelligence work to MI5:

*"To suggest now that the most sensitive element of policing – the policing of loyalist and/or republican violence, or both – should be removed from the primacy of policing and delivered to a much less legally and democratically accountable body – MI5 – is to risk seriously undermining the many advances currently underway."*

The testimony however also provided us with an opportunity to place the debate about policing in a wider context. We placed on record our concern that the devolution of criminal justice and policing be carried out in strict compliance with best human rights practice. We argued that the occasion of devolution be used to introduce and strengthen a range of human rights safeguards, not least a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland.

Congressman Smith, in his opening remarks, made reference to the International Fund for Ireland. This provided CAJ with an opportunity to have read into the Congressional Record some data it had compiled from government statistics on continuing community differentials. There clearly is some serious controversy about the US's role in investing in Northern Ireland, and it was helpful to make it clear that there are very serious inequalities that need to be actively addressed. There was a ready acceptance for our stance that inequalities need to be undermined and not exacerbated by investment, and this is clearly something that was close

to the heart of the many Congressmen and Senators, and staffers, that CAJ met outside of the Hearings proper.

The rest of the visit consisted largely of a series of social events and one-on-one meetings which provided important networking opportunities to discuss CAJ concerns. These included individual cases, the discussion of a Bill of Rights, policing change and the forthcoming visit to Northern Ireland of the Eminent Jurists Panel. The broader equality debate, and the contribution that economic investment could make to ensuring that Northern Ireland becomes a fairer and more just society, was also raised.

This was essentially an up-beat visit. Most of those met did indicate that they saw the importance of the work that groups like CAJ is doing, and they want to be supportive in any way possible. The subsequent follow up will take a substantial of work, but already Congress is pursuing the idea of a joint House and Senate resolution on the case of Patrick Finucane. US cross-party support of this kind has always proved invaluable in the past in maintaining pressure on both the Irish and British governments to live up to the human rights commitments they made in the Good Friday Agreement.

This visit provided CAJ with an opportunity to both thank those who have been active in this debate over the years, and to urge that they maintain their constructive interest in the human rights agenda here.

## "NI would love a Bill of Rights!"



Campaigners from the Human Rights Consortium in Writers Square with a Valentine's Card for Minister David Hanson, in advance of their meeting with him on Valentine's Day (see article on next page).

## Around the table on a Bill of Rights

Readers of Just News will know that the Human Rights Consortium (a coalition of 110 organisations) has been actively campaigning for a strong and inclusive Bill of Rights for NI since 2000. Over the past few months, the Consortium has met with representatives of the British and Irish Governments to push for movement on the establishment of the proposed Roundtable Forum of political parties and civil society to move the Bill of Rights forward.

In a meeting with Minister Hanson in February, we were assured that the UK government would be driving the Bill of Rights forward, and was in fact meeting with the political parties over the coming weeks to specifically discuss options for the Roundtable. Minister Dermot Ahern similarly assured us that the Irish Government was committed to a Bill of Rights for NI and the establishment of a Roundtable Forum, and would continue to raise this with the UK Government. Importantly for the Consortium, both Ministers reiterated the importance of civic society in this process.

The Human Rights Consortium has been lobbying for some time for the Roundtable Forum to be established, and we are therefore very pleased that progress is at last being made. This is clearly a unique opportunity to bring political parties and civil society together to discuss the rights we would like to see protected in a Bill of Rights, and as such will also serve as an effective way of encouraging debate among wider society about this important issue. Clearly, however, there is work to be done in deciding how the Roundtable should operate. Important questions arise such as how will civil society be represented?; who will chair it?; how will decisions be made? All these questions need answered to ensure that the Roundtable operates in as effective and productive a manner as possible.

For its part, the Consortium has developed a set of principles to inform this discussion. In summary, these are:

### Aims of Roundtable Forum:

- civil society and political parties to reach agreement on rights and values for NI's future.
- consensus among the political parties and civil society.
- draft provisions of a Bill of Rights for NI to give to the Secretary of State.

### The Roundtable Forum will:

- Engage political parties and civic society (the latter to be adequately represented).
- Have an independent chairperson.
- Be adequately supported and resourced, with own independent secretariat.

### The Chair of the Forum:

- Should have an established international reputation.
- Knowledge and experience of human rights principles.
- Experienced in political negotiation and the implementation of reform.
- Independent of both governments.

### Process:

- guided by principles of openness, transparency, inclusiveness and accessibility.
- Hearings should be held in public, in a variety of locations – with oral testimony to help reinvigorate the debate and develop ownership of the process.

### Decision-making:

- No one participant or group should be allowed to 'veto' proposals.
- Decisions should be made on the basis of broad agreement.
- Decisions should be made on the basis of the following criteria:
  - *No undermining of current international/regional protections.*
  - *Recognisable gains, especially for the most disadvantaged.*
  - *Effective enforcement mechanisms.*
  - *Represent the diversity that is Northern Ireland.*
  - *Promote equality for all.*
  - *Move beyond the ECHR to include, in particular, socio-economic rights.*

### Role of NIHRC:

- Should remain independent of the roundtable process.
- Forum should build on the work carried out by the Commission to date.
- Commission could comment on the final Roundtable proposals from a legal and technical perspective in presenting to the Sec of State its final advice.

### Role of government:

- Listening brief.
- Provide adequate resources to the process.
- Commit themselves to implement the Forum's proposals where these have widespread support and meet the criteria outlined above.

The Human Rights Consortium has worked tirelessly since 2000 to keep the Bill of Rights issue on the agenda of governments, stakeholders and civic society. Successes can be limited and slow in campaigns but we are delighted that there is movement at last on setting up the Roundtable Forum. The Consortium has also secured funding from Atlantic Philanthropies which will enable us to carry out a wide ranging programme of work over the next two years, which will hopefully enable us to secure a strong and inclusive Bill of Rights for the people of Northern Ireland!



## Human Rights and Northern Ireland: An I

**“If we really want to protect dignity and equality and security, we have to deal with poverty, we have to deal with homelessness, and we have to deal with access to basic social and economic rights. It is really ultimately a question of full citizenship, of affirming a progressive notion of a “just society”.” (Porter)**

This book is a collection of articles and speeches given at CAJ events over the last 10 years or so by a wide range of very eminent human rights thinkers, practitioners and advocates.

It is a fitting testimony to the work of CAJ since it was established 25 years ago. It is also a poignant reminder of the work of Stephen Livingstone who contributed so much to the CAJ and to the ideal of an inclusive and just society, but who left us with the task of continuing his work.

These articles, dating from 1995 - 2002 give testimony to the developing peace process and in particular the human rights debate that at times has been on the margins of political development, and at other times more central. One recurring theme from all the contributions is the optimism that comes from a diverse group of contributors. After all, there are not many times or places that have offered people a ‘blank sheet’ upon which to draw up a new framework for the future.

Several of the contributions offer useful insights into previous and parallel processes in the development of human rights mechanisms in other countries that have offered us inspiration and advice.

For example, Chief Justice Beverly McLachlin’s chapter is a useful introduction to the whole book, outlining as it does the process in Canada of developing what would become the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The Chief Justice reminds us that the development and implementation of a Bill of Rights is not merely a legal and constitutional process. It is also a process of change for a whole society. Indeed it was the process of arriving at the Canadian Charter that gave it life beyond the page.

This holistic ‘whole-society’ focus is reprised by Mary Robinson, speaking as the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in 2002. Her concluding contribution highlights the Bill of Rights process in Northern Ireland up to that point. She encourages us to seize the opportunity and realise the need to be ambitious and to push at the boundaries. This, she states, is not only important for us, but also for those watching who may be influenced by our progress. She also highlights the role of the Human Rights Consortium, in bringing together a wide range of civil society organisations.

There is an interesting current that runs through this book. It is perhaps Shattuck, in the second contribution to the anthology, who best outlines how the promotion of civil and human rights contributes to reconciliation and good government.

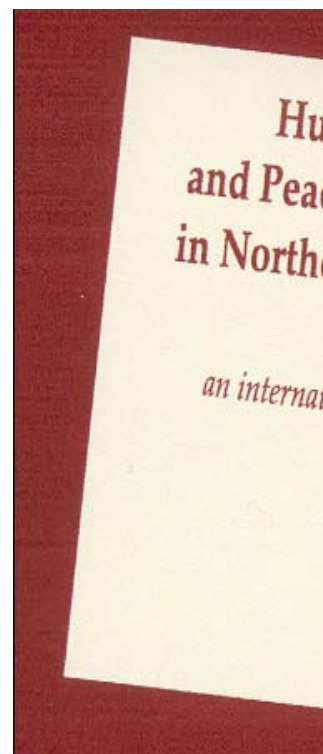
He identifies a wide range of actors from within civil society who must play their part in making progress towards reconciliation saying, “movement towards the future begins with a responsibility of governments and people for reckoning with the legacy of the past.” Common to many contributors, Shattuck outlines the centrality of human rights for a society that is marked by justice and reconciliation, and how it is not the narrow responsibility of government alone but of us all.

We often hear the refrain, and it is getting louder in this apparent ‘new world order’, that rights constrain effective policing and security, the ‘one hand tied behind the back’ syndrome. We hear of measures that curtail our freedoms but that are now ‘essential’ for our security, an argument which encourages the closing down of any debate rather than allowing effective scrutiny.

This makes the contribution by Francesca Klug seem all the more current. In one of the ‘post 9/11’ contributions, she reminds us that the idea of rights has evolved over time, reflecting different social and political circumstances. She identifies three generations of rights - liberty, community, mutuality - all converging on the overarching value of human dignity. She also offers a timely reminder of the sort of arguments used by those suspicious of human rights. The first of these is the notion that human rights are all about the individual, the second is that human rights are detached, legalistic and not grounded in real life and real life crises, and the third suggests that human rights are a new and dangerous secular religion...

She disagrees...

“Human Rights very simply put are a set of ethical values, which speak, I hope, to those of all religions and those of none. They are values created by human beings for human beings in times of crisis and in times of peace. They will



# Human Rights and Peace Building in Northern Ireland: An International Anthology

forever be contested, they forever need to be defended and they forever need to be open to evolution, change and self-reflection. But their potential to inspire should not be underestimated..."

Sir Nigel Rodley continues the theme of human rights in times of crisis... "human rights are a discourse for conflict resolution". They do not provide the answers to long-disputed problems but they "create the rules of the game". This can take human rights into the murky waters of controversy, as rights abuses may be seen or perceived as part of the conflict by one side or another.

Speaking as a UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, he describes the sea change that has seen human rights move slowly to the centre of the agenda. It is now the norm to have human rights built into constitutions and they are commonly central features of peace settlements around the world today. Indeed, affirming this in an annex, is the essay by Paul Mageean and Martin O'Brien 'From the Margins to the Mainstream' analysing the human rights contents of the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement.

There is no doubt that events in South Africa over the last 15 years have had a profound impact on other areas of conflict, not least Northern Ireland. Some argue that the two contexts are so different, there are no lessons to be learned. Others argue that this huge process of change, so relatively peacefully achieved, has lessons for us all. This publication brings together three very different sets of perspectives and each offers us useful insights into the South African experience.

Justice Richard Goldstone focuses on the key theme of reforming the judiciary. This was an interesting process given that in moving from an apartheid judiciary to a new, democratic judiciary - it remained largely the same judiciary. A peaceful transition meant that many people stayed 'in post' and whilst people can change quickly, it is essential that leadership comes from the top. So when a judge from the highest court suggested that a Bill of Rights and a written constitution may be the way to go the possibility for debate was suddenly open.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu describes the South African experience of coming to realise and recognise the humanity

in the 'other' which was, of course, central to the operation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Justice Albie Sachs also spent some time discussing the TRC in his contribution. He describes it as a three-stage process - the stories of the victims, reparations, and the granting of individual amnesties to perpetrators. He highlights the significance of the TRC in making two countries and two narratives become one. There are the individual stories but "national reconciliation is of a different order."

He also reminds us that no-one is above the law, even the President, and that whilst people don't necessarily change overnight, the framework in which they operate and make decisions has changed. Old assumptions have been questioned because what might have been accepted as 'the norm' may actually have represented the partisan interests of the dominant group, in South Africa's case, a clear minority of the population.

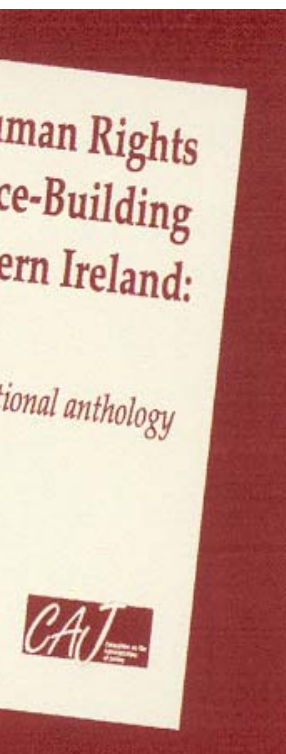
The other key theme in this publication is something which CAJ has set as a clear priority for its work - the issue of social and economic rights. When you talk to people about what protections they think are important to thrive in society, it is invariably 'rights' that might be labelled social and economic that they will highlight. Having said that, they like many others appear not to 'recognise' these as rights at all, but something to do with politicians.

Both Professor Stein Evju and Bruce Porter highlight what they see as a false distinction between civil and political and social and economic rights. We are aware that a common response from some politicians is to see issues relating to the allocation of resources (political code for social and economic rights) as resting with the political class - of course we know that running elections fairly as well as the criminal justice system are real bargains! These rights often illuminate the lives of the most disadvantaged in society and should not be lost in an argument about there being too many rights! Social and economic rights have incrementally gained status and are increasingly being written into documents and ruled upon. These are 'real life' rights dealing as they do with issues such as housing, education, health care and reasonable income and standard of life.

This publication offers us a flavour of the sort of issues and the calibre of speakers that have contributed to the human rights discourse of Northern Ireland. It also highlights the huge contribution that CAJ has made to the human rights landscape of Northern Ireland. Be inspired - be very inspired...

## Barbara McCabe

To order "Human Rights and Peace Building - an international anthology" please contact CAJ's Offices on 0044 (0) 28 9096 1122 or email to [info@caj.org.uk](mailto:info@caj.org.uk)



## Say No to Tasers

**Mention tasers or 'stun guns' to the happily unaware public in Northern Ireland and chances are they think of Star Wars, with images springing to mind of heavily clad, belted figures 'zapping' and 'beaming' each other with gusto, the zig zag electric blue line causing those invincible characters to halt momentarily in their tracks before bouncing back to continue to 'fight the good fight'. Nothing could be further from the truth.**

In the US the use of tasers by police forces has expanded from use against dangerous individuals where the alternative is lethal force, to use against a range of vulnerable groups and individuals, including children, to exact compliance, a phenomenon dubbed in other context as '*mission creep*'.

The NI Policing Board, in a recent consultation document, described the effects of Taser in clinical language "*the charge causes a loss of some voluntary muscle control, resulting in the subject falling to the ground or "freezing" on the spot*". The description of its impact given by one victim, a 75 year old woman from South Carolina is very different. She described the electricity from the Taser as travelling "*all over your chest like a big snake or something worming to try to get out... I was waiting to die so the pain would go away*". Tasers rely on achieving compliance through use of pain, rather than pain being a side effect of their use, a characteristic of the weapon which challenges the prohibition on torture, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.

The Chief Constable had advised the Policing Board of his intention to purchase twelve taser weapons for use by PSNI Specialist Firearms officers. On 7 March 2006 the Policing Board circulated a consultation document on the proposed introduction by the PSNI of Tasers to a limited group.

Children's rights and human rights NGOs, the Human Rights Commission and the Children's Commissioner raised very serious concerns in relation to the "consultation" process. The Children's Law Centre (CLC) and Save the Children (SCF) stated in their submission that their serious concerns regarding the consultation process had particular resonance given the Equality Commission's finding on a complaint lodged by the CLC and nine other NGOs about the NIO's breach of s75 when introducing ASBOs into this jurisdiction. Our concerns focused on the nature, status and basis for the consultation, the weight to be given to consultation responses in any final decision regarding tasers, the truncated consultation period of only sixteen days (substantially shorter than the two month period recommended by the Equality Commission), the restricted list of consultees, and the lack of any commitment to carry out the required screening process or an Equality Impact Assessment.

CLC and SCF also asked the Policing Board what it had done, given its role in ensuring overall accountability of the PSNI, to ensure that the PSNI was fulfilling its statutory duty under section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, particularly in respect of children, in relation to the proposed introduction of tasers.

Given the seriousness of the concerns raised we welcomed the decision taken by the Policing Board on 28 March, to request that the PSNI undertake an equality screening exercise and conduct the associated consultation required by section 75, and for the Policing Board to seek the views of its own Human Rights Advisors on the introduction of tasers. CLC have now written to the Chief Constable to ascertain how and when he will comply with this request.

CLC and SCF will engage further with the Policing Board and the PSNI in relation to the proposed introduction of tasers and their potential impact on children. Among the child specific concerns we raised in our initial response and which we will pursue were:

- Given the level of pain and suffering inflicted through the use of tasers their use against children represents a serious breach of a number of domestic and international human rights standards protecting children, including the European Convention on Human Rights, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the UN Convention Against Torture.
- At a minimum there is a need for the inclusion in any ACPO and PSNI guidance on tasers of a requirement that they are never used against children; the guidance should also address the issue of minimising risk to children from being accidentally hit by Tasers.
- Electric shock does not affect everyone equally. Those with smaller body size and lower weight are more susceptible to adverse effects. We understand there is little if any evidence in relation to the impact of tasers on children. We question whether the 'extensive trials and medical testing' referred to by the Policing Board in their consultation document included any specific focus on children and whether the Policing Board or PSNI can be satisfied beyond doubt that tasers, if used against children, would not have a disproportionate adverse impact.

These questions and issues in relation to the use of Tasers generally and specifically against children need to be fully consulted on and satisfactorily answered by both the PSNI and the Policing Board *before* a decision is taken in respect of their introduction.

**Sara Boyce**  
**Children's Law Centre/Save the Children**  
[www.childrenslawcentre.org](http://www.childrenslawcentre.org)



## ***‘CEDAW doesn’t do anything for you unless you use it’***

**On 21 March Shanthi Dairiam, currently serving a 4 year term (2005-2009) as an expert member of the CEDAW examining committee, spoke at a meeting organised by the Equality Commission and Ad-Hoc Women’s Policy Group. The NGO sector was left in no doubt on the crucial importance of its role in ensuring that governments were thoroughly scrutinised for their efforts to eliminate discrimination against women in domestic law.**

CEDAW - the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women - is the principal legal instrument addressing women’s rights and equality. In the period leading up to the next periodic examination of the UK government in 2007 it is vitally important that we promote awareness of CEDAW and build capacity for its implementation.

Reports by state parties to the CEDAW Committee indicate the legal, administrative and programmatic measures they have adopted to give effect to the provisions of the CEDAW Convention. There is no enforceability mechanism for CEDAW. It is a monitoring mechanism, and governments who submit to a periodic examination of their record are told whether or not they have done a good job. In a striking phrase Ms Dairiam declared ‘CEDAW doesn’t do anything for you unless you use it.’ The importance of giving alternative information to the Committee is that it alerts the Committee to gaps and flaws in the official report, and in this way helps the Committee to ask more rigorous questions, forcing the state party to substantiate its claims. The Committee issues concluding comments, assessing the current position of women in the country under review, and making recommendations for future change. These concluding comments can be given wide publicity, and can be used by the NGO sector to force the pace of change.

### **On developing a strong shadow report**

The women’s sector was given clear guidelines of what needed to be done to ensure maximum impact for the next UK government report. We will need to build a constituency to produce a strong shadow report. Government reports are deficient on providing analysis of why women’s status is low in their country and they do not provide specific recommendations on what they would do in the future. Ms Dairiam stressed the importance of Articles 1-4 of CEDAW, which concern legal standards and obligations of government and frameworks for action. Commenting on these articles provides an opportunity to comment on how equality is viewed in the particular country and what is the

dominant culture. ‘Neutrality is discrimination’ she declared, a phrase that will be repeated many times by those of us fighting for positive action measures for women. In this first part of CEDAW macro policy issues can be considered, for example, on whether women are included within a National Economic Plan. When a country’s performance is examined in a shadow report it has to be written in accordance with each article of the Convention and the Committee reviews the submission article by article.

### **British and Irish reports to CEDAW**

Ms Dairiam made a number of observations relating to the performance of the Irish and UK government’s submissions to CEDAW. In her view, the Irish report had no strategic view or framework for women’s advancement and lacked a normative standard of equality to pull together all the individual issues raised.

The UK government received criticism for its treatment of migrant women, for the fact that teenage pregnancies were the highest in Europe, for poverty rates amongst older women and for the increasing numbers of women in prison. Policies regarding violence against women, women and decision making and job segregation were other critical areas where there was no definition of discrimination and an absence of remedies.

### **The Optional Protocol**

The Optional Protocol to CEDAW, which the UK government ratified in 2003, allows for a complaints procedure, whereby an individual can petition the CEDAW Committee for redress if all domestic remedies have been exhausted. The Optional Protocol allows for both individual complaints and for inquiries. Inquiries are into gross or systematic violations of rights. The Committee can be alerted to the fact that systematic violations of women’s rights have taken place by a letter sent to the Committee. They will investigate, consider liability and write a report issuing recommendations. With the complaints procedure, there must be an injured party, although there is provision for someone to file a complaint on their behalf if the person can’t file their own complaint. This remedy led to an interesting discussion regarding the denial of abortion rights to women in Ireland and possible future action.

The monitoring and complaints systems in place for CEDAW provide good tools for those interested in protecting and defending women’s rights. NGOs should make use of these tools to ensure governments are fulfilling their responsibilities in this regard.

### **Margaret Ward**

#### **Women’s Development and Resource Agency**

(a fuller account of this event can be found at <http://www.wrda.net/policy-fast-facts.php>)

## Civil Liberties Diary

**March 1** Peter Hain defends the appointment of Don McKay to the Parades Commission after it emerged that he supplied the name of a nationalist politician as a referee without consulting her.

UUP announces that it has had a "productive" meeting with Minister David Hanson over the potential introduction of a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland.

**March 2** Tony Blair refuses to meet family of murdered Belfast man Peter McBride who are calling for the soldiers responsible to be dismissed from the British army.

**March 3** NIHRC expresses concern that asylum seekers arriving in Northern Ireland are being shipped directly to detention centres without access to legal counsel. They are currently being held at a centre on the Crumlin Rd and at Hydebank Wood.

A new report alleges that the British government is failing in its obligations to Irish speakers. The research into the implementation of the European Charter for Regional or Minority languages was by Irish language umbrella group Pobal.

In Dublin Judge Smithwick begins investigating allegations of Garda collusion in the 1989 murders of RUC superintendents Harry Breen and Bob Buchanan.

**March 6** Police are accused of heavy handed tactics after a raid on the Alexandra Bar in north Belfast. The PSNI fired itinerant rounds of CS gas into an upstairs room when attempting an arrest of suspects.

**March 8** Chairman of the Policing Board has said that a repeat of the civil unrest that accompanied last summers marching season must be avoided. Prof Desmond Rea said colossal amount of money had been needed to police it.

**March 9** Party leaders in the Dail unanimously approve motion calling

on the British Prime Minister to honour a 2001 commitment to hold an independent judicial investigation into the murder of solicitor Pat Finucane.

**March 13** Families claim that evidence that may have implicated UVF members in the murders of Andrew Robb and David McIlwaine has been suppressed so as to protect a suspect employed by Special Branch.

**March 14** Appointments to the Policing Board are announced.

**March 16** CAJ and other human rights NGOs testify at US Congressional hearings on policing advances and remaining challenges

**March 22** A protest against "anti-social behaviour" is staged on the Donegall Rd in South Belfast at the scene of a racist attack on an eastern European resident.

Bertie Ahern warns the British government that the investigation into the murder of solicitor Pat Finucane as currently planned could not be seen as independent.

**March 23** House of Lords overturn an appeal court ruling that a Muslim girl's human rights were violated when she was banned from wearing a head-to-toe Islamic dress to school.

**March 25** Oireachtas Joint Committee publishes recommendations based on report of Mr. Justice Henry Barron which was critical of the Garda investigation of the 1976 murder of Seamus Ludlow. The Committee called for a new investigation.

Outgoing Police Board vice-Chairman, Denis Bradley, warns against lead responsibility for intelligence being transferred to MI5.

**March 27** Irish Health Service report claims hundreds of asylum seeker children who have been separated from their parents are at risk of exploitation due to a lack of follow up

checks on young people reunited with adults claiming to be their relatives.

**March 28** Members of the Policing Board are urged to reject a PSNI request for officers to be armed with Taser guns as equality assessments or independent medical tests have not yet been carried out.

**March 30** The Family of Seamus Ludlow call for a public inquiry into allegations that the Garda failed to fully investigate the 1976 murder.

British government take the decision to make changes to a public inquiry into the murder of Robert Hamill in 1997. It is now to be held under the new Inquiries Act.

*Compiled by Mark Bassett from various newspapers.*

### Stephen Livingstone Scholarship

The Queens University Belfast Law School has established a scholarship in honour of Professor Stephen Livingstone. For further information please contact

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Closing date for this award: 9th June 2006.



**Just News** welcomes readers' news, views and comments.

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