Bulletin of the Committee on the Administration of Justice
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Just News
Human Rights in Northern Ireland

The Human Right Act: breaking the myths

Faced with the horrors of extreme crime and terror, the Human Rights Act (HRA) has been an easy target for attack in recent months. Although the Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs has now reviewed legally entrenched human rights norms and spoken out in there defence, he rightly acknowledged that misunderstanding and myths continue to dominate much discussion of human rights. BIHR strongly opposes calls to scrap or weaken the HRA as this would mean that ordinary people would lose the important protection that human rights offer. Instead, we agree with the Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs that there is an urgent need for better understanding of this important statute.

Does the HRA prioritise the rights of individuals over public safety or victims?

No – the rights of individuals do not automatically override those of the wider community. The HRA is based on a set of values that seek to secure the respect and dignity of every individual. Thus, victims often have special protection under human rights law. It is important to bear in mind that not all the rights in the HRA operate in the same way. While some are 'absolute' and should never be interfered with, others are 'limited' or 'qualified' in nature and contain an in-built mechanism to balance the rights of the individual with those of others or the public interest.

How has the HRA helped ordinary people?

The following examples followed British Institute of Human Rights human rights training sessions, for voluntary and community groups and local authorities:

- The parents of a learning disabled patient in a hospital noticed unexplained bruising on their son. When they raised the issue with staff, their concerns were dismissed and they were no longer allowed to visit. After receiving human rights training they used their son's right not to suffer inhuman or degrading treatment and their right to respect for family life to challenge the hospital. The ban on their visiting has been overturned.
- A social worker from the domestic violence team at a local authority received training on the 'positive obligations' placed on the local authority to protect the right to life and right to be free from inhuman and degrading treatment. She went on to use human rights arguments to secure new accommodation for a woman and her family at risk of serious harm from a violent ex-partner.

These institutions changed their policy once the law was explained to them: there was no need to go to court. There have also been some important legal cases in the courts that have further protected the human rights of ordinary people. For example, Mr Bernard was looking after his six children and his disabled wife in a home that was not suitable for their needs. Although their local social services department recommended that the family be provided with specially adapted accommodation, they heard nothing for over a year. When their case came before a Court, the judge held that the local authority had a positive obligation to enable the family to lead as normal a family life as possible and that they had not done this – in breach of their Article 8 right to respect for family life. See *R (on the application of Bernard) v Enfield LBC* [2002].

What is a 'human rights culture'?

The HRA is not just about legal cases. The broader and deeper aim behind the legislation was a democratic one: to build in every citizen a consciousness of shared ownership of the fundamental values of society, enforceable as a last resort through the legal process.

Where people do know about the HRA and how to claim their rights under it, BIHR believes the evidence shows it leads to common sense results. Scrap or weaken the HRA and individuals in unjust situations will suffer most.

Katie Ghose (British Institute for Human Rights)
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The PACE Amendments – A Missed Opportunity

Over 25 years ago, the Royal Commission on Criminal Procedure put together a carefully crafted set of measures designed to regulate police powers in the wake of the *Confait* case in which three young people were wrongly convicted on the basis of false confessions. These measures, which came to be known as PACE (the acronym for the Police and Criminal Evidence legislation enacted after the Commission reported) balanced the need for police powers against a range of safeguards. They included a right to legal advice for all suspects and a right for all young persons and persons who are "mentally disordered" or otherwise vulnerable to be accompanied in the police station by an appropriate adult.

In the intervening period, however, the careful balancethat was put together by the Royal Commission has been disturbed by a series of new provisions giving increased powers to the police while the safeguards have not proved to be as effective as they should have been.

At the time of its introduction in Northern Ireland, PACE was accompanied by restrictions on the right of silence. A new caution warning suspects that a failure to answer police questions may harm their defence at trial put pressure on suspects to cooperate with the police. Since then, the police have been provided with ever increasing powers under amendments to PACE, including powers to detain certain suspects for longer periods, powers to take fingerprints and samples for DNA purposes without consent in a greater number of cases and powers to keep these on databases even when suspects have not been prosecuted for offences.

Over this period concerns have been voiced about the impact of some of these powers on vulnerable people. The Criminal Justice Review recommended that independent research be commissioned into the effects of the new caution on young persons and that those volunteering to act as appropriate adults should receive training by a wide range of agencies. The research which followed found that the complicated wording of the new caution left many young persons mystified. Appropriate adults, who in over two thirds of youth cases are the parents of suspects, were unable to assist in explaining the caution and sometimes proved more of a hindrance than a help in giving advice to children. Furthermore, less than half of young persons asked to see a solicitor. The research recommended that the police be required to advise young persons to seek the advice of a solicitor, that a Northern Ireland-wide duty solicitor scheme for PACE cases be considered and that there should be clearer guidelines and training for appropriate adults.

In the first major review of PACE in Northern Ireland since 1995, the opportunity arose this year for these recommendations to be implemented. Instead, however, the NIO proposes a series of amendments further increasing police powers. Under the proposals the police will be given a new power to arrest persons for any offence if this is considered necessary. In addition existing powers such as entry and search of premises and further detention, which can presently only be authorised in the case of those suspected of serious arrestable offences, will be authorized against those suspected of any indictable offence. There are also increased powers for taking fingerprints, lowering the authorisation levels for intimate searches and taking samples. There are additionally two new codes of practice covering the visual recording with sound of interviews.

By contrast, the training package for appropriate adults proposed by the Criminal Justice Review has yet to materialise and none of the recommendations of the research it proposed have been implemented. Even the modest recommendation that the police be required to advise appropriate adults of their role as soon as they arrive in a police station has not found its way into the new codes of practice. Childrens' groups have also lamented the fact that the definition of juvenile will not extend to all persons under 18, despite the fact that 17 year olds have already been brought within the ambit of the youth justice system.

It is disappointing that the NIO is proposing to introduce new powers that are already in force in England and Wales without taking an imaginative look at how the legal advice and appropriate adult safeguards could be strengthened. It is clear from research that parents, guardians and social workers in care centres who are emotionally involved in the general welfare and caring of young persons are not best suited to undertake the role of guiding young and vulnerable persons through the routine but often alien procedures of the PACE custody regime. Volunteers uninvolved in the general welfare of the suspect could, on the other hand, undertake such a role, provided resources were made available for proper training. The NIO should take these proposals away and think again.

John Jackson (Queens University)

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

Police complaints: Is all going well?

A five year review is now underway of the Office of Police Ombudswoman for Northern Ireland (OPONI). Since this office was first recommended by Maurice Hayes in 1997, it has required 2 Police Acts (1998 and 2003) to bring its powers somewhat into line with what Hayes originally proposed.

The Patten Commission saw this office, in the form Hayes suggested, as 'a key strand in the governance of policing' in Northern Ireland. Since that time, it has charted some stormy waters and been embroiled in significant controversy. Such disputes are to be expected in a body so integrally involved with the police transition process in Northern Ireland, and in a context where many different agendas were competing for space and power over policing.

OPONI has not always been well served by government in its attempts to provide a thorough accounting for police wrongdoing in a key transitional period, when the legacy of such bodies as the 'Independent Commission for Police Complaints' and the former Police Authority needed to be left far behind.

The Government engaged in an enormous amount of footdragging over the need to provide the office with powers to investigate and comment on policy and practice outside of individual complaints. Notably the Secretary of State at the time of the Omagh Inquiry Report was not sufficiently robust in his support of Nuala O'Loan when she sought to speak of flawed policing leadership over the handling of the investigation into the Omagh bombing.

This said, the extra powers accorded under the 2003 Police Act were well warranted, and as a result OPONI has been effective in bringing a number of important issues into the public and organisational spotlight.

The 5 year review should in no way attempt to lessen those powers, but could make important contributions in strengthening the powers and status of this office at an important juncture in the peace process. In many ways, it is not necessarily the handling of individual complaints, but the access this gives in terms of tracking patterns and trends, and the ability of OPONI to undertake investigations in the public interest in the absence of a complaint, which are among the most important functions of this body.

Mediation

Mediation is an area where OPONI has long felt it needs further powers. The legalistic and highly bureaucratic investigation processes on offer are not always what is required to address and resolve specific complaints. Where current informal resolution processes feel is in the access provided to a different way of facilitating dialogue and addressing conflict between the PSNI and members of the public. Mediation processes should be facilitated – but must be led by independent experts trained and experienced in conflict resolution techniques and mediation processes. More formalised engagement with mediation would require robust monitoring and evaluation strategies. This would ensure mediation is fulfilling its potential.

In terms of the review of powers, it is essential that the Office itself consults much more widely and effectively. This would ensure broad societal input to the process. In the meantime, many of the issues raised in the CAJ commentary of June 2005 provide much valuable food for thought in terms of making this office as effective as it can possibly be.

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To order CAJ's "Commentary on the Office of the Police Ombudsman for Norhern Ireland" (Price: £5), contact the CAJ office on 028 9096 11222 or email: info@caj.org.uk

CAJ and British Irish Rights Watch are seeking to contract the services of one or more individuals to act as observers to a number of public inquiries which will run from September 2006. The deadline is the 25th August.

Please see http://www.caj.org.uk/ to view the invitation to tender.

USA at UNCAT

This past year, the US engaged with the United Nations' Committee Against Torture for the first time since the events of September 11th and its ensuing "war on terror". The US's appearance before the Committee offered a more comprehensive accounting than usual of the Bush administration's views on torture in the context of the war of terror. After a dialogue with the US government and various interested NGOs, the Committee issued its report on the US's torture record. Not surprisingly, the Committee strongly critiqued the US for its ill-treatment of detainees in the "war on terror".

As many readers of Just News are aware, the US has continually attempted to justify its treatment of detainees by pointing to the unique circumstances of fighting a terrorist organization rather than a sovereign nation. The Committee recognized that the US has an indisputable duty to take all possible measures to protect public security, but stressed that it must do so within a framework that guarantees respect for human dignity and conforms to the Convention Against Torture.

This article focuses on some of the more striking failures of the US to comply with the Convention Against Torture, but will include examples of similar failures of the UK.

The Committee criticized the US's narrow interpretation of "torture". The Convention Against Torture defines torture as "any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for … obtaining information or a confession, punishing him … or intimidating or coercing him … or for any reason based on any discrimination of any kind …" The Committee specifically criticized US interpretation of the meaning of "severe" and the US assertion that psychological torture requires "*prolonged* mental harm."

The Committee also denounced the US practice of allowing evidence obtained through torture or inhuman or degrading treatment to be admitted at trials. The Committee had similarly condemned the UK for this practice during its review of the UK's torture record in 2004. While the debate regarding admission of evidence obtained through torture is still outstanding in the US, the House of Lords recently issued a decision in *A and Others v. Sec. of State* that held that it is unlawful for British courts to rely upon evidence that might have been obtained through torture. While this ruling represents a victory for human rights advocates, it nevertheless contains certain exceptions that remain troubling. For example, the House did not extend its ruling to situations where evidence might have been obtained by inhuman or degrading treatment, as recommended by the Committee.

The Committee also criticized the US for attempting to rely on its war on terrorism to justify derogation from the Convention. The Committee levelled similar criticism against the UK in 2004, when it urged the UK to review the alternatives available to indefinite detention under the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001. The Committee stressed to both States that the Convention applies similarly at all times, whether in peace, war or armed conflict.

The US and the UK are among the most influential players in world politics and the primary advocates for human rights around the globe. For these two States to shirk their responsibilities under the Convention Against Torture is troubling and many states, particularly those with questionable human rights records, have already "co-opted" the war on terror to justify their torture policies.

For example, shortly after September 11th, Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak declared: "the new US policies proved that we were right from the beginning in using all means … to combat terrorism … There is no doubt that the events of September 11 created a new concept of democracy that differs from the concept that Western states defended before these events …"

And in Liberia, then-President Charles Taylor (currently awaiting trial at the Hague for war crimes and crimes against humanity) told the Liberian legislature that challenge to his own grip on power was an extension of the global terrorist threat. In June 2002, Hassan Bility, an internationally respected journalist who had been critical of Taylor's policies was arrested, and detained without access to a lawyer, and tortured under interrogation. Taylor justified his actions by claiming that Bility was an "unlawful combatant". Clearly, fragile democracies and some of the world's alleged war criminals are more than ready to seize on the US's actions in the war on terror to justify their own questionable policies.

The dangers that follow when States such as the US derogate from the absolute right to be free from torture are many. The Committee against Torture was correct to condemn the US for attempting to do so. Perhaps publicity generated by the Committee's finding will help bring public opinion to bear on the US in this regard.

Reforming the UN

In recent years the United Nations has been undergoing an extensive period of reform. Not surprisingly, much of this reform has focused on the UN's various human rights mechanisms, including the UN Commission on Human Rights and the UN treaty bodies system. This article will briefly consider some of these reforms.

In its early days, the UN Commission on Human Rights enjoyed many important successes. However, in recent years the Commission began to lose much of its credibility. States with records of gross violations of human rights were allowed membership to the Commission and were thus able to protect themselves and their cohorts from international condemnation.

Last year, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan finally came to the conclusion that the best way to improve the commission was to dismantle it and replace it with a smaller council that would be identified as a "society of the committed". After a year of intense negotiations, the new United Nations Human Rights Council has emerged and officially began its work on 19 June 2006.

The Council differs in a number of ways from its predecessor. Unlike the Commission, which met only once a year for a six week session, the Council will meet at least three times for 10 week sessions, with a right for one-third of its members to call additional sessions "when needed". It is hoped that this will allow it to more rapidly respond to human rights situations as they develop. Another important innovation of the Council is that it will conduct universal periodic review of States' human rights records. Furthermore, members are bound to "fully cooperate" with the period review investigations.

The biggest change, however, will be how Council members are selected. Under the previous system, potential members were nominated by regional groups and then rubber-stamped by the UN Economic and Social Council. In contrast, election to the Council will require the high threshold of an affirmative vote by an absolute majority of the UN's 191 members — that is, 96 positive votes. It is hoped that this will ensure that States with records of significant human rights abuses will be barred from representation on the Council.

Although it has received less international press, the UN treaty body system will also undergo significant reform. Negotiations are currently ongoing as to the exact form that this will take.

The principle objective of the human rights treaty body system is to ensure human rights protection at the national level through State implementation of treaty obligations. All monitoring bodies require treaty parties to submit reports reviewing measures they have taken to bring their national law and policy into line with treaty provisions. The reporting process also provides an opportunity for various sectors including NGOs, civil society and individuals to offer submissions on a State's human rights record. After engaging with the State and other interested parties, the Committees issue Concluding Observations, providing specific advice to States on how to improve their human rights situations. The entire monitoring process allows for international scrutiny and helps bring public opinion to bear on a States' human rights abuses.

Despite the many accomplishments of the treaty body system, it also has its shortcomings. State compliance with reporting requirements is relatively low. Reporting procedures vary greatly amongst the treaty bodies, compounding problems with compliance. However, even if States increased their compliance with reporting procedures, the current treaty body system would be unable to process State reports in a timely manner and a backlog of work would ensue. Lastly, the various treaty bodies are not sufficiently apprised of each other's work at the national level, creating information gaps.

In 2005, the Secretary-General recommended strengthening and streamlining the treaty body system, and called for implementation of harmonized guidelines on reporting to all treaty bodies, so that the treaty bodies can operate as a more unified system. The High Commissioner for Human Rights, Louise Arbour, recently took the Secretary-General's proposal a few steps further, proposing a unified standing treaty body, in lieu of the seven separate treaty bodies in existence today.

Although the current treaty body system faces some challenges, the proposal to create a unified standing treaty body raises some concerns. For example, would consolidation of treaty bodies result in less scrutiny of the implementation of specific rights, such as freedom from torture and racial discrimination? Would the establishment of a unified standing treaty body in place of the existing bodies diminish the capacity of the treaty body process those sectors of the government and the community dealing with those specific issues? Given the success of the current treaty body system in the Northern Ireland context, concerns such as these should not be lightly discarded.

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Competing Currents? Racial Equality Progress and Threats

There has been some recent positive movement at a Northern Ireland level in terms of securing the human rights of minority ethnic groups. A Racial Equality Strategy has been launched and Departments have appointed Racial Equality Champions and issued Annual Implementation Plans.

In the past, localised good practice by individual Trusts and Councils was hampered by the lack of strategic framework for roll out, and little planning of public provision for population changing through inward migration. The Strategy therefore has the potential to have significant impact. One initial drawback is the Ministerial decision not to allocate specific funding to the new strategy. Whilst many initiatives can come from existing budgets there are limitations without budget lines, for example, District Councils can deliver on their legal duty to tackle racism– but would have greater impact with resources. Nevertheless there is scope for some optimism for movement at Department level.

Migration policy meanwhile remains the preserve of Westminster and there is cause for concern that aspects of it will actually work against the aims of the Racial Equality Strategy.

2006 sees the latest in a series of migration bills and measures to be phased in by introducing a points based system based on five tiers . This, to an extent, simplifies and puts on a statutory basis a number of existing schemes.

In recent years there have been some positive shifts in migration policy ethos– namely a move away from effectively zero primary immigration to opening up further channels. However the stated focus of new policy is about the economic benefit to everyone else of migration - i.e. how to best extract skills and labour from the migrant. Ensuring the human rights and interests of migrants and their families is almost entirely overlooked in this approach.

In this context, there appears to be a pattern of prejudice informing policy. Take the following sentences from a Home Office consultation document "*..migrants make a relatively greater contribution to the public finances than non-migrants. Indeed this gap has widened in the last four years. In 2003/4 migrants accounted for 10% of government tax receipts and 9.1% of government expenditure*.." Yet the policy conclusion in the same document is that the managed migration system *"must be supported by measures to limit the impact of migration on public services and the public purse."* The economic need for migration is being married with the perceived 'public opinion' demand to be 'tough' on people who are migrants. This is reflected in policy and has serious implications on the civil, human and economic rights of migrants and others:

- Under the Worker Registration Scheme restrictions were extended to eight EU countries that acceded to the EU in 2004. This restricts access to benefits for migrants from these states under a number of circumstances. Social assistance safety nets are there for a reason and the impact in human misery of removing them has been entirely predictable.

- Other human rights concerns are broad including an increasingly assimilationist approach to immigration, proposals for financial bonds, ending rights to appeal and switch categories. Immigration enforcement is perhaps the area of greatest concern. The Human Rights Commission has already voiced concerns about existing powers and their use. New policy proposes an expansion in a number of areas– including the increasing privatisation of immigration control by expanding legal obligations on non state actors (e.g. employers) to police immigration status or face charges. Migrants may also be the effective guinea pigs for ID cards with proposals for "a biometric residents permit without which it would not be possible to work or access services" – all of which could lead to increased racial profiling to the detriment of migrants and non migrant members of black and minority ethnic groups.

- In terms of economic rights the exploitation of vulnerable workers (including migrant workers) is a serious concern. It is weakness in the framework of employment rights that allows this to happen, both loopholes/gaps in UK employment law and secondly lack of enforcement of the existing laws. At local level there is now movement on this issue with Departments meeting together for a more cohesive approach to enforcement - and indeed some new powers have been granted - yet there remain key gaps in the legislative framework that require redress.

In conclusion, there is hope for movement on a range of issues at a Northern Ireland level but the institutionalisation of demands made from popular prejudice will make the task much harder.

Daniel Holder
ANIMATE

Case by Case

Rosemary Nelson Inquiry

Following the opening hearing in April 2005, and in the light of submissions it received, the Inquiry issued its List of Issues on 12th May 2005 and its Procedures Document - setting out the procedures which it intended to follow in its work - on 23rd May 2005. In June 2005, the Inquiry issued its Funding Protocol, dealing with public funding for legal representation for all whom the Inquiry wishes to assist it in its work.

In December 2005 the Inquiry announced that full hearings would be delayed by a year due to the volume of evidence and the complexity of the issues. In the last six months, the Inquiry has continued to gather evidence, with Eversheds (solicitors) conducting witness interviews in Northern Ireland and elsewhere. To date more than 270 people have been asked to provide witness statements.

Robert Ayling, a retired senior officer with Kent Police, and a team of former police officers, are preparing a report on the police investigation into Rosemary Nelson's murder for the Inquiry. Over the past nine months this team have gathered the material generated by the original police investigation. The Inquiry have stated that because of the size of this task and the recent disclosure of important material, it will now be September before the draft report from Mr. Ayling is ready. After it is considered by the Inquiry, this draft report will be given to the solicitor for Colin Port (representing those police officers who worked on the murder investigation) for their initial comments. In the light of those comments, Mr Ayling will finalise his report and the Inquiry says that it then hopes to disclose it to the other Full Participants.

Full hearings are now due to begin on the 16th January 2007 in Belfast. The Inquiry website address is www.**rosemarynelsoninquiry**.org.

Hamill Inquiry

The Chair of the Hamill Inquiry asked the Secretary of State to convert the Inquiry to one under the Inquiries Act 2005, and in March 2006 the Inquiry was duly converted. There are no other changes to the panel or the terms of reference.

However, most recently, the Inquiry received and considered applications for anonymity by some serving or former police officers and hearings were held on this issue to determine if the risks of harm to these witnesses, when balanced against the public interest, meant officers would give evidence anonymously. CAJ and BIRW pointed out that the allegations in this case are so serious that they engage the public interest which is why a public inquiry is being held, and that it is not in the public interest that the role of policing be carried out anonymously. Furthermore, while appreciating the difficulties in deciding what can be put in the public domain when determining anonymity applications, CAJ and others were concerned that the Inquiry issued a restriction order under section 19 of the Inquiries Act 2005 which excluded the Hamill family (who have interested party status) and observers from these hearings. We are currently waiting for information about these hearings to be put in the public domain. We also await its decision on anonymity to be published on the Inquiry website.

The public hearings are scheduled to start on 5 September 2006. The Inquiry website address is www.roberthamillinquiry.org.

Billy Wright Inquiry

The Inquiry has said that to date the recovery and assimilation of relevant documentation and the Northern Ireland Prison Service has been a major focus. It issued a press statement in June saying that it had become apparent that certain relevant documents do not appear to be available. And they have decided it is necessary to hold an oral hearing in the October of this year, dealing specifically with this issue. Meanwhile, David Wright has challenged the decision to convert the Inquiry to one under the Inquiries Act (see June issue).

The Inquiry website address is www.billywrightinquiry.org

Finucane case

The Finucane family has rejected the limited authority of any inquiry under the terms of the Inquiries Act of 2005. Dail Eireann adopted a resolution on March 8, 2006, calling for the establishment of a full public independent judicial inquiry into the murder of Patrick Finucane. The US House of Representatives has also passed a resolution urging the government to immediately establish a full, independent, and public judicial inquiry into the murder of Patrick Finucane which would enjoy the full cooperation and support of his family, the people of Northern Ireland, and the international community, as recommended by Judge Cory.

Civil Liberties Diary

2nd June Research by the NIHRC highlights a number of weaknesses in the human rights training provided for new PSNI recruits and puts forward proposals.

15th June Justice Oversight Commissioner Lord Clyde, in his 6th annual report, says more needs to be done to end lengthy delays in the criminal justice system.

16th June Families of six men shot by the UVF in Loughisland in 1994 say they have been completely let down by the original police investigation. No one has ever been brought to justice in this case. The police had destroyed the getaway car after two years despite the fact the investigation was ongoing.

21st June NIHRC criticises the detention of asylum seekers who arrive in the north now being transferred to a former jail in Scotland.

Report by John Simpson, Commissioner for judicial appointments, has found that procedures for appointing members of the judiciary in the north remain inadequate. Problems surrounding consistency was a criticism.

The British government is protecting the security forces by not allowing a fully independent inquiry into the murder of Pat Finucane says Irish Taoiseach Bertie Ahern. He stated his regret that the government had not honoured an agreement to open inquiries.

22nd June Study by Equality Commission reveals that ethnic or racial minorities face more discrimination than either Catholics or Protestants.

23rd June Victims campaigners have called for an inquiry into the PSNI's inability to secure convictions against UVF members for the 29 murders they have committed since the 1994 ceasefire.

24th June UN OHCHR and the NIHRC organise conference for Belfast so that participants can see at first hand the challenges of protecting human rights in a society which experiences regular outbursts of communal violence and political instability.

26th June The Welfare and academic performance of some migrant school children in N. Ireland is failing because of a lack of adequate provision according to Concordia.

27th June Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM), publishes report branding the province the race hate capital of Europe. This follows a weekend of racist attacks on eastern European workers. There were almost 1000 racist incidents in 2005/06 period, a 15% rise on the year before according to the report.

29th June British High Court judge, Mr. Justice Sullivan, quashes control orders on six suspected terrorists saying the Home Secretary had no power to make them under human rights law. Home Secretary has pledged to appeal the decision.

5th July DUP councillors in Lisburn DC pledge to continue flying the Union flag all year long, despite findings from the Equality Commission that by doing so it is failing to comply with its own equality scheme.
Gay couples will be able to adopt children for the first time in N. Ireland under new government proposals. This right will also extend to unmarried couples living together.

6th July Independent assessor of military complaints Jim McDonald clears Army of any recklessness when firing on rioters during last year's Whiterock parade disturbances.
Mental health groups voice concern after it is revealed that 1.3 million prescriptions were issued for anti-depressants last year. A recent report from the WHO estimated that by 2020 depression would be the second highest cause of disease in the world.

7th July The policing of a controversial Orange Order parade in Belfast two years ago was undermined by a lack of proper communication between community representatives and the PSNI a report from the Police Ombudsman reveals.

18th July PSNI procedures and training of its officers for vehicle pursuits are criticised by Police Ombudsman after an investigation into the death of Raymond Robinson who drowned following a police chase in Whiteabbey in 2004. However, no officer was guilty of misconduct.

20th July
Police Ombudsman Nuala O'Loan voices concerns about moves to transfer the management of national security in Northern Ireland from the PSNI to MI5.

24th July
CRJ Ireland spokesman Jim McAuld says it will resist any attempt by the British government to force it to co-operate with the PSNI. This follows the announcement that funding will depend on police oversight.

26th July
PSNI 5th annual report reveals it is on target to meet recommendations on Catholic numbers. However, the force failed to meet some key targets set by the Policing Board to combat concerns about crime, including reduction of overall crime, particularly violent attacks.

Compiled by Mark Bassett from various newspapers.

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