

Tools for Action: Making Economic and Social Change

Mary Robinson, former President of Ireland, and former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, gave the keynote address last month at a landmark International Forum held in Dundalk examining how the most vulnerable communities and groups in Ireland can challenge the disastrous impact of the global financial crisis.

The International Forum, Tools for Action: Making Economic and Social Change was hosted by the Participation and the Practice of Rights (PPR) Project which works to support disadvantaged communities and groups in using a human rights based approach to address socio-economic inequalities and deprivation.

On a global level, the separation of economic development from social progress has resulted in widening inequality and a financial crisis with disastrous human consequences. Across the island of Ireland the 'Celtic Tiger' era and the years following the Good Friday Agreement produced unprecedented economic growth. Yet, social and economic inequality and disadvantage have become more entrenched. For example, in May 2010, it was reported that the number of vacant homes in the Republic of Ireland could be as many as 1 in 5. Yet in 2009 the Department of Environment counted 56,000 households in need of social housing – a figure that is 30% higher than the previous Housing Needs Assessment conducted in 2005.

Statistics released by the Northern Ireland Neighbourhood Information Service (NINIS) in May demonstrated that the depressing realities that have been the condition of these communities for decades are virtually unchanged. In 2005 the official list of the top 20 locations in Northern Ireland which were most deprived was dominated by areas in North Belfast, West Belfast and Derry. Five years on, the most recent figures show that this remains true. 15 out of the 20 areas which were among the 20 most deprived in 2005 are still among the 20 most deprived in 2010.

These realities demonstrate that current systems of economic and social governance are not delivering sustainable development; neither are they engendering the processes or the outcomes required to create sustainable change. The learning from the PPR Project and other initiatives across the globe has demonstrated that the meaningful participation of vulnerable groups in social and economic decisions which affect their lives will result in the improved effectiveness and efficiency of

public service delivery, resource allocation, and economic growth. However tools and strategies are needed to ensure that the current power imbalance in decision making structures which lead to the exclusion of the most vulnerable are addressed.

Speakers at Tools for Action: Making Economic and Social Change, included Thomas Linzey Community Environmental Legal Defence Fund (USA), Kamayani Swami JJSS (India), and Professor Christopher McCrudden, Oxford University (UK). International examples of how tools such as community organising, social auditing and procurement can be used by the most disadvantaged communities and groups to challenge current systems of decision making were given. The work of groups supported by the PPR Project in using a human rights based approach was also presented alongside the tools used by these groups e.g. human rights indicators and benchmarks, to make change in the decision making practices that result in their exclusion.

As part of her keynote address, Mary Robinson said:

"We often talk about democracy but we don't practice it in the way you are doing and that is what is so incredibly significant. I hope that you will have actually more opportunities now to show the importance of your work in forums outside Ireland where it can actually be part of documenting the experience that you have had because it does have much wider application."

Podcasts of the speakers' presentations will be posted on www.pprproject.org.

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Human Rights

A great deal has been written and said over the past number of years in relation to the Northern Ireland Prison Service. The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC), the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, the Prisoner Ombudsman for Northern Ireland, Criminal Justice Inspection (CJI) and others, have made hundreds of recommendations for change. Although many have been taken on board, a significant number of unimplemented recommendations still exist and considerable deficiencies remain unaddressed. In response to the CJI December 2009 report on the treatment of vulnerable prisoners, NIHRC Chief Commissioner Monica McWilliams noted that “the Commission has in the past made a range of recommendations in regard to the prison estate specifically addressing suicide and self-harm and it is deeply disturbing to find some of the same issues still arising in the Inspector’s report.”

The Prison Service (NIPS) and the prison estate are highly scrutinised aspects of the Northern Ireland criminal justice system. The recommendations made by the numerous inspection and monitoring bodies relate to a variety of issues, which primarily deal with either managerial/procedural deficiencies and housekeeping issues or breaches of rights within the prison system. The response from NIPS to the various inspections and reports may be interpreted as ‘lip service’ given that comprehensive change is slow and many of these recommendations remain unaddressed. In response to every report written, NIPS creates an action plan and has recently undertaken to consolidate the action plans into a master plan. That many of the same recommendations for improvement have been repeated over the years suggests that although NIPS creates actions plans, there is no systematic method of addressing problems or implementing the recommendations.

Significant attention has been recently given to Maghaberry Prison, yet the approach to improving the prison system, as a whole, has been both insufficient and piecemeal. Experts suggest that, from a human rights point of view, prisons and a prison system must be just, humane and effective. Despite varying views on imprisonment and notwithstanding the complexity of prison management, particularly in Northern Ireland, there are international and regional human rights standards and guidelines which should be adhered to.

The UK Parliament Joint Committee on Human Rights has confirmed that “when the state takes away a person’s liberty, it assumes full responsibility for protecting their

human rights” and one does not relinquish all rights by virtue of imprisonment. The European Prisons Rules (2006) state that “*persons deprived of their liberty retain all rights that are not lawfully taken away by the decision sentencing them or remanding them in custody*” (rule 2). Similarly, the UN Human Rights Committee (General Comment 21) emphasises that persons deprived of their liberty enjoy all the rights set forth in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Prisons serve various purposes but the very nature of incarceration serves as punishment; being deprived of liberty is the punishment and treatment inside the prison should not amount to further punishment unless permitted by prison rules and in line with international human rights standards. Regardless of the crime which they committed, prisoners are human beings endowed with dignity and it is the view of the United Nations that “*while facing situations of lawful limitations of freedoms and rights, prison officials are at the forefront of human rights protection on a daily basis, experiencing them and putting them into practice; respecting them and enforcing their respect.*”

CAJ has recently collated into broad themes the recommendations repeatedly made by approximately 30 review and inspection reports over the past few years in order to help identify the overall issues which remain unsatisfactorily addressed and to facilitate a human rights analysis. Very often the same concerns, more or less, have been raised in 7 or more of nearly 40 review/inspection reports thus demonstrating that many recommendations to the prison service are not effectively, efficiently or consistently acted upon. The research identified the following overarching themes as being mentioned most repeatedly and thus warrant significant attention: Safer Custody; Security; Staffing and Management Issues; Daily Activity and Long-term Planning (including purposeful activity, PREPS (Progressive Regimes & Earned Privileges Scheme), resettlement and reintegration; Health and well-being; Living conditions; Diversity and Equality; Complaints; Women; Discipline; Life-sentenced prisoners; and Juveniles.

When looking at the prison system through a human rights lens, the system in Northern Ireland does not measure up to international and regional human rights benchmarks. There is evidence for the need to step back and undertake a root and branch appraisal of both the policies and practices of the prison system and to subsequently address the problems in a holistic manner.

and Prisons

The prison system as a whole should be examined in relation to effectiveness, efficiency and adherence to international human rights standards so as to construct a *strategic approach of systemic reform*. Addressing the issues repeatedly presented as cause for concern, through a human rights filter, would be a step in this direction and would be in line with the NIPS commitment “to protecting the human rights and dignity of our staff, prisoners and all others with whom we come into contact.” Furthermore, it would be in line with their plan to “continue to take forward a comprehensive review of all...existing policies, practices and procedures to ensure that they are human rights compliant.”¹

The reality is that Northern Ireland offers significant opportunities that do not exist in Great Britain or Republic of Ireland given that the prison population size is comparatively very small and given that very few of those prisoners pose a serious threat to prison staff or society. Instilling a human rights culture would in turn deracinate the existing work-ethic which is presently rooted in security and control. Moreover, devolution has offered an unparalleled occasion to create fundamental change.

The Prisoner Ombudsman wrote in her annual report that in order to “move away from a primarily security-focused Prison Service to one where the emphasis is on education, training, health (and in particular mental health) services, addiction services, vocational training, work experience, resettlement services... with a view to reducing re-offending rates, there will be the need for a strategic approach”.² A strategic approach based on fundamental human rights is the way forward.

NIPS is clearly aware of the need for change, yet change has been slow. With continually better policies in place why does there appear to be a continued lack of link up between policy and practice? Changing the culture within the prison system would in turn lead to better implementation of policy and therefore less criticisms and fewer recommendations.

NIACRO has proposed a commission like the Scottish Prison Commission yet a number of politicians have rejected this possibility on the basis that the financial resources available post-Good Friday are no longer available. The speculated primary cost would arise from early-retirement payments for prison officers. This, however, appears to be rather short-sighted and fails to recognise the potential savings from running a more

efficient and fit for purpose prison system. Indeed, there is a financial imperative to examine the prison system and make the necessary fundamental and structural changes.

Change in the culture of the system is what is needed and it should not be overlooked that good leadership is essential to a healthy effective prison system. After many years of the same criticisms being voiced in report after report, the question arises as to who is ultimately responsible? Who needs to be held accountable for the changes that have yet to take place?

¹ Northern Ireland Prison Service. *Blueprint, Corporate Plan 2009/12 and Business Plan 2009/10*

² Prisoner Ombudsman for Northern Ireland. *Annual Report April 2008 –March 2009*

Human Rights And the Administration of Justice: Criminal Justice Review + 10 September 2010 Date & Venue: TBC

Following the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement, the Criminal Justice Review Group proposed numerous reforms relating to the ‘structure, management and resourcing of publicly funded elements of the criminal justice system’ in Northern Ireland.

It has been ten years since the Review and it is time to take stock. What proposals are still unfulfilled? What are the implications of devolution?

In light of several recent expensive conferences on ‘shaping the future’ and ‘delivering excellence’ in the field of policing and criminal justice, which do not appear to sufficiently engage or involve local communities and NGOs, and do not present representative speakers, CAJ is organising a conference in the early autumn to look at the opportunities and challenges of taking a human rights approach to the administration of justice, particularly in the context of devolution.

To be kept informed of conference developments or to register your interest, please contact Jacqueline at jacq@caj.org.uk

Welcome developments for Inquests

Chief Constable v Coroner Judicial Review

CAJ welcomes the High Court judgment of 27 May 2010, which held that the Senior Coroner was correct to decide that the next of kin in a number of historical inquests are entitled to see the 'Stalker' and 'Sampson' reports in the deaths of their relatives. These reports which followed investigations by former Greater Manchester Police Deputy Chief Constable John Stalker and Sir Colin Sampson of the West Yorkshire, and which have never been published, are to be provided to the families in redacted form in a number of controversial cases.

This application for judicial review taken by the Chief Constable challenged the decision of the Senior Coroner where he directed that copies of these reports be shared with other interested parties in these inquests. The Chief Constable asserted that the Coroner refusing to first rule on the relevance of these materials, would impede any applications for a Public Interest Immunity Certificate for proposed redactions to these reports. In dismissing this application the Court held that the function of the Coroner is unlike that of any other judicial office and has a wide-ranging discretion. Mr Justice Gillen held that:

"If inquests are to maintain public confidence, put minds at rest and answer the questions of the families who are bereaved, it is vital to ensure that the interested parties/next-of-kin can participate in an informed, open

and transparent fashion on an equal footing with all other parties throughout the various stages of the inquest, including, at the outset of the process, the very scope of the inquest."

This ruling supports the decision of the Senior Coroner, who has followed the approach taken in the Princess Diana and Dodi Al-Fayed inquests to view disclosure in a generous light, which is essential given the serious allegations that surround these deaths.

We hope that the Chief Constable will immediately disclose these reports into the circumstances surrounding these killings to enable these inquests to proceed without delay.

Attorney General decision

CAJ also welcomes the decision of the new Attorney General who has ordered a new inquest into the controversial case of Francis Bradley, killed by the army in 1986. Although an inquest was held into this death in 1987, those involved in the shooting were not compelled to attend and potentially significant intelligence material was not disclosed to the Coroner. This development will potentially impact on other inquests in which those accused of causing the death were not previously compelled to engage in the coronial process.

CAJ volunteer is recognised at Stormont event

CAJ's volunteer, Mrs Rose Perry, attended an event hosted by Volunteer Now to recognise the contribution that volunteers in the older age group 60+ make to communities and society generally. This formed part of Volunteer Week celebrations. There was a prize giving to those aged 60+ volunteers who helped with the advertising campaign for Volunteer Now.

Rose Perry was thrilled to meet Naomi Long MP (recently Mayor of Belfast and Alliance Representative in East Belfast) and to see the Assembly and Senate Chambers at Parliament Buildings, Stormont. This photograph of Rose Perry, Naomi Long and Liz McAleer (CAJ) was taken at the infamous staircase where Northern Ireland's politicians often pose for photographs.

More about our Rose...

Rose Perry has been a volunteer with CAJ for the best part of 20 years, first offering her services back in the early 90s. She came to CAJ initially to get legal advice and support on a personal case in which CAJ was successful, and in appreciation, Mrs Perry decided to offer her help in the CAJ office in a voluntary capacity. Rose volunteers every month in the preparation of Just

News, outlining the staff diary and regularly attends CAJ events. We love to see her arrive into the office, she is known affectionately to all the staff as "Mrs P". Her visits do nothing for the waistlines of staff though, as she brings us in toffees and goodies. She has a lot to chat about, very often entertaining us with her humorous stories of life. She jokes about when she will be made redundant – all we can say to that Mrs P is – don't hold your breath!



The new Coalition government – what does it mean for Northern Ireland?

Since the devolution of criminal justice and policing, the Northern Ireland Office has a much-reduced workload. However, the issues that remain in their brief are big ones, most notably dealing with a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland and dealing with the past. With a newly constituted coalition government at Westminster, and thus new incumbents as NIO ministers, what are the implications for these issues?

On the Bill of Rights, the Conservative party manifesto highlighted the party's intention *"to protect our freedoms from state encroachment and encourage greater social responsibility, we will replace the Human Rights Act with a UK Bill of Rights."* The manifesto of the Liberal Democrat party was the opposite of this, promising to *"ensure that everyone has the same protections under the law by protecting the Human Rights Act."*

The initial coalition agreement was noticeably silent on the issue of the Human Rights Act or Bill of Rights, talking instead of a "Great Reform Bill" and promising to repeal various pieces of anti-civil liberties legislation passed under the Labour government. Media scrutiny was not slow to pick up on this and in the weeks that followed there was some high-profile questioning of where the Human Rights Act stood in the new coalition government. In the fuller agreement it is perhaps unsurprising therefore that the Bill of Rights was back on the agenda, this time in the form of a commitment to *"establish a Commission to investigate the creation of a British Bill of Rights that incorporates and builds on all our obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights, ensures that these rights continue to be enshrined in British law, and protects and extends British liberties"* (emphasis added). While this formulation sounds positive on the face of it, since the implication is that, whatever else is agreed, the eventual product would have to be Human Rights Act plus, rather than minus, many questions remain to be answered. For example, who will the members of this Commission be, what experience will they have, what are the terms of reference, how will it operate and what resources will it be given, to name but a few.

Why is this relevant for Northern Ireland? Well, first and foremost, it is not clear whether the coalition government intends the "British" Bill of Rights to be a "UK" Bill of Rights, or whether the more ambiguous language was deliberately selected by some amongst the negotiators to allow for Scotland and Northern Ireland to be treated differently, given their distinct devolution arrangements. The Conservative party policy was, and still is, that they would not legislate for a specific Bill of Rights for

Northern Ireland but rather include a specific section on Northern Ireland in any UK Bill of Rights. Given that the Minister and Junior Minister in the Northern Ireland Office are both Conservative (in contrast to most other Departments, where the ministerial portfolios are shared between Tories and Lib Dems) this policy has direct implications for the debate here.

Indeed, in recent correspondence to CAJ from the Secretary of State, Owen Patterson, he indicated his intention that Northern Ireland would be included in the process of the Commission to be established to look at a Bill of Rights "for the UK". He seems happy to use "British" and "UK" interchangeably; it is not clear if the Liberal Democrats agree. This approach also seems to disregard the quite different genesis of the debate in Northern Ireland around the pros and cons of a Bill of Rights. Writing in the Irish News on 15th March of this year, however, *the Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs clearly stated that "The Irish government is strongly of the view that a specific and substantial Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland is a central and crucial element of the Good Friday Agreement."* Given that the Irish and UK governments are bound by the international treaty incorporating the Good Friday Agreement, how are these differing positions to be reconciled?

On dealing with the past, June was a momentous month for the Bloody Sunday families and for human rights (see page 6). The apology tendered by Prime Minister David Cameron, and the tenor of his response overall in parliament, were widely appreciated. But the publication of the Bloody Sunday report and the subsequent debate has made it clear that Northern Ireland's past remains to be addressed. The Conservative Party have previously said little on this beyond not establishing any more expensive inquiries.

However we have learned by way of an NIO press release that the Secretary of State has *"begun a process of listening to the views of people across the community on dealing with the past in Northern Ireland."* In this statement, Owen Paterson said: *"I recognise the importance of the legacy of the past in Northern Ireland. I intend to listen to a range of views on how best I can contribute to dealing with this issue. The Minister of State, Hugo Swire, and I will conduct a number of meetings with people from all parts of the community over the next few months."* Who they will be meeting, what the framework for discussion will be and the status of the meetings are all unclear.

“Unjustified and Unjustifiable”

The 15th of June 2010 is a date that will never be forgotten in the history of Northern Ireland. It was the date that the truth was set free. For the families of those killed or injured on Bloody Sunday, on 30th January 1972, the publication of the Saville Report represented one thing – vindication for their loved ones; a confirmation by the government that all of the victims of that awful day were innocent and that none of them posed a threat of causing harm or injury. The journey for truth and justice by the families of the bereaved and injured has been a long and painful one, fraught with setbacks, bureaucracy and investigative reports which were inaccurate, but which further fuelled the need to uncover the truth.

The Saville report is clear in laying the blame for the atrocities at the hands of the army, confirming it was they who fired the first shot. The Prime Minister, David Cameron, who addressed the House of Commons shortly after the publication of the report, reiterated that the actions were “unjustified and unjustifiable”, saying that the report itself was “shocking,” that the actions of Bloody Sunday were “wrong” and that he was “deeply sorry.” President Obama later spoke of the “historic nature” of the David Cameron’s statement to the House of Commons and commended the events surrounding the Saville report for their “contribution to Northern Ireland’s reconciliation efforts.”

The scenes in Derry were highly emotional, as the families and their supporters retraced the walk that their loved ones had taken on Bloody Sunday. The families received the report with a sense of justice and relief, signalling to the crowds of the Guildhall Square that they were pleased with the findings. Speaking shortly afterwards, Tony Doherty, whose father, Paddy Doherty was killed, said “the victims of Bloody Sunday have been vindicated and the Parachute regiment has been disgraced.”

CAJ welcomed the long awaited publication of the report, but believes that it is the follow up to the report which is now of crucial importance. We urge caution against any approach which says there will be no more independent inquiries because we cannot be sure of new and relevant facts which may emerge in the future. The government must look at a comprehensive method to deal with outstanding issues from the past. We would remind the government that proposals for dealing with the past were made in the Eames Bradley report, which has recently been consulted on. The onus is on the government now to bring that process forward.

CAJ will provide a more detailed analysis of the Saville report in upcoming issues of Just News.

Other Reactions to the Saville Report

Mark Durkan MLA, SDLP:

“The people of my city have not just lived through Bloody Sunday, they have lived with it since” and that the victims were all “absolutely exonerated by today’s report.”

Gregory Campbell MLA, DUP:

“There are thousands of people throughout the United Kingdom who have been denied justice and may never know who was responsible for the death of their loved ones. They have had no costly inquiries nor have they received the attention of the international press corps...People will be glad that that this sorry saga of a report is finally over and done with.”

Gerry Adams MLA, Sinn Féin:

“Today Saville has put the lies of Widgery into the dustbin of history and with it the cover-up which was authorized of the highest levels within the British Establishment and lasted for almost four decades.”

UUP statement:

“The cost of Saville has not just been the £200 million of taxpayers’ money. It is also in the pain and division it has brought through a selective investigation into the Past... If we have learnt one thing, it must be this - no more Savilles.”

Stephen Farry MLA, Alliance Party:

“While the detail of the report will require serious scrutiny it is clear that this report confirms what has been understood for decades, that those killed by British forces on Bloody Sunday were completely innocent.”

Brian Cowen, An Taoiseach:

“In Derry today, and across the North, a new generation is growing up in peace and equality. They do not face the injustices that motivated the civil rights movement in 1972.... There is no doubt. There are no ambiguities. In truth, there never were. They were innocent. May they rest in peace.”

Kate Allen, Director, Amnesty International UK:

“The inquiry into Bloody Sunday began with a promise of truth and we hope that today, over 38 years since 14 civilians were fatally shot by British soldiers at a civil rights march, that promise has been fulfilled.”

Jane Winter, Director, British Irish RIGHTS WATCH:

“BIRW salute the survivors of Bloody Sunday, who have campaigned with great courage, dignity, and dedication for 38 long and difficult years in order to ascertain the truth and restore the good names of the victims. The report vindicates their efforts and rewards their patience.”

Integration of DPPs and CSPs

CAJ recently responded to the Northern Ireland Office consultation on the proposed integration of District Policing Partnerships (DPPs) and Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs). CAJ is not opposed in principle to the integration of DPPs with CSPs. In point of fact, what was envisaged in the Patten and Criminal Justice Review reports was a single partnership Board, and it was a decision by the Northern Ireland Office to create CSP structures in parallel. However, in its consultation submission CAJ noted the following headline concerns:

- DPPs were conceived first and foremost as a system of accountability by the police to the local community. CAJ is concerned that the integrative model proposed may be utilised as an opportunity to further dilute the power of local accountability mechanisms and displace their key function of accountability. These mechanisms were not originally or solely designed to prevent crime or enhance community safety as is now suggested.

The workings of any new accountability arrangement must be defined by two core objectives: the concept of direct accountability of the police service to the community and a decentralised policing service where multi-agency policing and policing with the community can flourish.

The proposed models appear to overly draw from the CSP model and further dilute the core concepts behind the DPP Boards. This is to say that the proposed models are shaped by state-centred (NIO) imperatives and infused with a 'government/police security alliance' perspective. By extension, the focus continues to be state-security instead of human security through democratic accountability and transparency.

- The name 'Policing Partnership Boards' reflected the core objectives of accountability and 'collective community policing' as envisaged by Patten, not crime reduction.

The proposed name of 'Crime Reduction Partnership' amounts to a rejection of the core purpose of the Boards as accountability mechanisms and displays a dangerous disregard for an issue that for many lay at the heart of the conflict. In contrast local policing structures are an important mechanism to create and deepen democratic policing - they are not merely crime reduction partnerships. As envisioned by Patten, the DPPs are about holding the police to account and as such are a crucial framework for the outworking of new community and police relations at the local level.

- The critical determinant of any proposed model for integration should be that local accountability mechanisms are a significant part of police reform, not a May 2011 deadline. In addition, CAJ is concerned about

what may occur if the change to 11 councils which is predicated on wider changes in local government is not implemented in May 2011, as seems likely. CAJ has challenged the premise that it is necessary to have these "new partnerships in place in time to coincide" with the changes in council boundaries slated for May 2011. Instead, the determinant should be that local accountability mechanisms are a significant part of police reform and understood by the Independent Commission on Policing as a conflict resolution mechanism. Under the current approach, what is the value of the proposed merger if changes proposed under the RPA are delayed for several years or not introduced?

- Any new arrangement for local accountability mechanisms should receive funding from the Policing Board for policing initiatives in the widest definition of the term.

Funding is a critical element that has hindered the full implementation of Patten and police reform broadly. Former Patten Commissioner Dr. Maurice Hayes has noted that the deprivation of funds from DPPs were "... a ploy to emasculate the Patten bodies and another attempt to dilute the effect of the Report" (Hayes, Policing with the Community Conference, 18 November 2009). The consultation document does not outline what the Policing Board's role will be with respect to funding. If funding is not filtered through the Board how will the Board meet its statutory responsibility with respect to its local accountability duties in relation to policing?

- The proposed models restrict the participatory process and do not ensure the mechanisms are representative of the community.

The Policing Partnership Boards should facilitate citizen participation. This is critical to enhance the democratisation of the mechanisms and transition to a more democratic policing system.

- The new Boards must remain Section 75 compliant. The police cannot be accountable to the community if the community and their perspectives are not proportionately represented in accountability mechanisms. CAJ is also concerned that the merger could result in less grassroots and less gender balanced mechanisms in addition to less representation from minority groups. CAJ is concerned about the appointment of independent members and maintains that it is critical the Policing Board retain this responsibility.

- Finally, CAJ maintains that the development of any model for the proposed integration of the DPPs and CSPs should be led by and occur in conjunction and consultation with the new devolved Justice Minister, the Department of Justice and the Northern Ireland Executive, not the Northern Ireland Office.

Civil Liberties Diary - May

7th May

A Tyrone man being questioned about a suspected Real IRA punishment attack fails in his bid to cast his electoral vote. The suspect, who was being held at Antrim Serious Crime Suite under anti-terrorism legislation, wanted police to take him to a polling station in Strabane. His application for leave to seek judicial review was dismissed by Mr Justice Treacy.

10th May

Figures released show that since 2006 the PSNI has spent more than £1.1m in defending cases at the industrial and fair employment tribunals. 102 cases have been brought in total.

12th May

PSNI statistics show a 24.3% increase in sectarian crimes last year. However, the Community Relations Council describes this as only the tip of the iceberg.

It is announced that the report of the Robert Hamill Inquiry will be ready by the end of the year. Judi Kemish, the solicitor and secretary to the Hamill investigation, said a series of recommendations would also accompany the findings.

14th May

The new NI Secretary of State Owen Patterson announces that the Saville report will be published on June 15th.

19th May

The High Court strikes out a damages claim brought against the Chief Constable and the Northern Ireland Secretary of States by the husband of one of those killed in the Omagh bomb.

20th May

A former Catholic priest who failed a security check and had to resign from his job with the police begins an action against the PSNI. Kevin Kennedy was told he could not work for the Policing Board because of secret information held about his brother. The case is expected to be heard in the High Court this autumn.

Television advertising by the Marie Stopes International group will not be shown in Northern Ireland. The commercials advise on unplanned pregnancies and abortion services.

Aidan McKeever launches a legal action against the Ministry of Defence for injuries suffered in 1992. He was shot by British soldiers in Clonoe, Tyrone at the same time four other men, all members of the IRA, were killed.

21st May

In Belfast, the High Court hears that a schoolboy's human rights were breached by the continued police retention of his DNA samples and fingerprints. However, the Lord Chief Justice agrees to allow the new Department of Justice further time to see how authorities in England and Wales deal with the issue.

25th May

John Larkin QC is appointed as Northern Ireland's first Attorney General in almost 40 years.

Former Metropolitan Commissioner, Lord Stevens, settles a libel action against the Sunday World and Sunday Life newspapers. The tabloids had falsely claimed he was linked with UVF supergrass Mark Haddock.

28th May

Attorney General John Larkin orders a new inquest to be held into the shooting dead of Francis Bradley by the SAS near Toomebridge in 1986. At the original inquest the two men who fired the shots were not compelled to give evidence.

The Chief Constable of the PSNI fails in a major legal challenge brought over secret reports into alleged shoot to kill cases in Northern Ireland. Mr. Justice Gillen ruled that senior coroner John Leckey was right to decide next of kin should be allowed to see edited versions of the probes into a series of controversial RUC killings 28 years ago. The Stalker/Sampson reports have never been made public. CAJ welcomed the decision and called on the call on the Chief Constable to accept the findings and provide disclosure to the family as soon as possible. See fuller report on page 4.

Compiled by Mark Bassett from various newspapers

Just News

Just News welcomes readers' news, views and comments.

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