

The struggle continues...

This year is the 100th anniversary of a strike by low paid women workers in the USA that led to International Women's Day, now celebrated globally every year on 8 March. It seems timely, in this March 2008 edition, to put my remarks as outgoing CAJ Director in the context of those events.

Most people would not think of me as a "rampant feminist" (whatever that means!). I have never primarily self-identified in terms of my gender; I suppose that makes me like most men I know! I was therefore surprised when women expressed particular excitement when I became Director in 2004. I was pleased, but could not see any special gender significance. It was my more perceptive male colleague who noted that the voluntary sector was largely staffed by women, but largely managed and led by men. Moreover, I was becoming director of an organisation that worked on contentious issues such as policing and criminal justice – not traditional "women's issues".

I was reminded of this exchange again recently. Many have been kind enough to arrange goodbye lunches and dinners – politicians and journalists, lawyers and academics, and those working in the voluntary and statutory sectors. But suddenly I noticed that they were predominantly female. By contrast, I reflected back on all those 'stakeholder' events attended, where women were obvious only by their absence.

100 years later...

Much has changed since 1908, but recent examples still have the power to shock. In the letters page of The Newsletter last month, a contributor angrily refuted any claim that God had created man and woman equal as un-biblical, and therefore untrue. For that reader, and presumably others, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights must be based on a false premise, opening with the assertion that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights". Moreover, if men and women are not equal, it is clearly irrelevant to campaign against unequal salaries or power relationships, unfair treatment or discriminatory language.

For a milder, but perhaps more troubling example of the distance still to travel, it is worth studying Policing Board minutes from last summer. It was formally proposed that male incumbents could be "chair", "chairperson" or "chairman" as they chose, and that a female incumbent

could be "chair" or "chairperson" as she chose. After discussion, it was agreed that a female incumbent could even be called a "chairwoman" ...a major advance for equality!

So, after 15 years of working at CAJ (and 17 before that at Amnesty) on major human rights violations locally and globally, readers may wonder why I decided to devote my "outgoing Director" article to questions of gender? My concern is really one of the invisibility of certain constituencies and issues. Apart from the "rampant feminists" amongst us, there seems to be widespread complacency that gender equality has been (largely) achieved? Indeed, is not the message generally in Northern Ireland one that "human rights/equality/social justice is now sorted"? Tell that to the many people who have not yet seen much tangible benefit arising from the peace process.

I have received kind messages from government ministers, senior politicians, the Chief Constable, the Lord Chief Justice, a Catholic cardinal and two Anglican archbishops. It is good for CAJ to have such access to powerful people (men for the most part). But that access is only valid if we continue, as we always have done, to campaign to give "the invisible" (of which women are only one segment, though numerically the biggest) their own place at the table - to assert their own experiences, claim their own rights, and thus remedy the wrongs done to them.

I am so proud to have been part of CAJ's efforts to do just that – to be a "beacon of hope" as the then UN Human Rights Commissioner Mary Robinson once described us. I know that I leave the organisation in safe hands and am entirely confident that CAJ will build on its past achievements and, through effective and persistent independent advocacy, will make this a fairer and more just society for everyone.

Maggie Beirne

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Maggie Beirne – Farewell to the Real Deal

CAJ has recently bid farewell to its outgoing Director Maggie Beirne. In this issue, CAJ Chairperson Kieran McEvoy reflects upon Maggie's contribution and some of the characteristics which she brought to the organisation.

Maggie came to CAJ in 1995 as a volunteer, telling me and others that she used to "do a bit of work with Amnesty International". As far as I was concerned at the time, she was a nice, politely spoken English person who was probably too genteel for the rough and tumble of Northern Ireland politics.



Maggie with other contributors to CAJ's Handbook, 4th ed. (2003)

Although the then Director Martin O'Brien was keenly aware of Maggie's background and experience and eager to put it to use, many of us on the Executive were blissfully ignorant. A number of us were then in our mid to late twenties, highly energised by the potential of the recent cease-fires, and viewed the world with the predictable confidence and clarity of that age.

Of course, Maggie's "bit of work with Amnesty" encompassed a twenty year career. She worked on torture and disappearances in Latin America, served as a member to the 1971 Amnesty International team which so effectively examined

internment here and was a long standing member of Amnesty's senior management team worldwide. I still blush at how patient and generous someone with that experience was to our passionate musings in the mid 90s.

Maggie has been at the core of many of CAJ's successes in the past decade. Together with Martin O'Brien, Paul Mageean and others, she was key to the work that sought to maximise the human rights elements of the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement.

Maggie managed the comparative policing project which significantly influenced the Patten report, authored the Misrule of Law report and related observing activities of contentious marches, oversaw the



Maggie Beirne

expansion in the fair employment and equality portfolio, and was key in the organisation's partnership and outreach strategies.

As Director Maggie has been centrally responsible for the organisation's repositioning to ensure the implementation of the rights and equality provisions secured in the Agreement.

CAJ is a small organisation which has always punched well above its weight. Its reputation as one of the most effective local human rights groups in the world is built upon individuals like Maggie Beirne. She is living testament to the capacity of a polite, respectful but absolute "will of steel" pressing of the human rights case to tilt the axis. We will miss her, she was and is the real deal.

Kieran McEvoy
CAJ Chairperson



Maggie's final day with the new CAJ Director, Mike Ritchie and CAJ staff & Human Rights Consortium staff

A Conversation with the New CAJ Director

What is your family background?

I was born in the Middle East to missionary parents (Mum is Danish Lutheran, Dad a minister in the Church of Scotland). We lived in Aden and Kenya before moving to Scotland when I started at secondary school, first in Aberdeenshire and then in Edinburgh.

Where and what did you Study after School?

I studied history at Edinburgh University and specialized in 18th Century Scotland – giving me a lifelong interest in the enlightenment period – and 20th century history. I then spent 3 years working for Voluntary Services Overseas in Egypt where I taught English in a secondary school near Luxor.

After Egypt, What Came Next?

In 1980 I moved to Belfast to study to be a teacher. After that, I worked in a variety of community and voluntary settings including the Simon Community, the Student Christian Movement of Ireland and the Ulster People's College before my first period with CAJ in 1989.

Is there a connection between all these strands of your work?

I suppose social and political (small "p") engagement with a tendency to judge society by the way it treats those outside the mainstream. I also know all these work experiences were held together by an interest in social change and the advancement of equality.

Tell us about your human rights interests?

I suppose from the time that my parents decided to send me and my siblings to local schools in Aden and Mombasa – rather than ex-patriate schools for other westerners – I have been sensitive to issues of racial prejudice and discrimination. I am so grateful to my parents that I was able to grow up in an atmosphere of diversity and mutual respect. It has stood me well in developing relationships across both normal and unexpected boundaries.

How does the experience of growing up in a racially unequal society translate to your work in NI?

Despite my Protestant and Presbyterian background, I have developed empathy with people from a Catholic background here in Northern Ireland. Similarly, despite the sense that Unionists/Protestants would not be involved in human rights issues or with republican ex-prisoners, I have been able to develop friendships and working relationships across that divide as well.

I have been particularly committed to developing contact with Unionists/Protestants who complain of human rights violations. I believe they are in an isolated position. I was pleased, for example to write the first article (for Just News) on the case of the UDR 4 on the basis of contact with their families who were finding it extremely difficult to gain a sympathetic ear. I was also particularly motivated to work with those raising the case of Brian Robinson, killed by British intelligence agents in circumstances where he could have been arrested.

I think the work done by CAJ on ill-treatment during detention, killings by the security forces and miscarriages of justice were important in setting the groundwork for the negotiations around the time of the Good Friday Agreement. The focus on police reform, on human rights protection, on the need for a Bill of Rights is all a credit to everyone involved in independent advocacy for human rights, irrespective of political or other opinion.

What about the Post-Agreement Context? How has the Agenda Changed?

Having achieved considerable focus on human rights and reform in criminal justice and policing, the issues now relate to appropriate implementation. The experience of the first Human Rights Commission shows that simply having mechanisms is not necessarily the solution. This is still contested ground. We will have to develop monitoring approaches to assess how effectively rights and equality are being built into policy and practice of relevant organizations. It will also be important to address resistance to rights and the distractions that will emerge as detractors seek to undermine progress that has been achieved. The other key question is dealing with the legacy of the conflict. This, I believe, is an area that will come into stronger focus over the next year.

You worked for the CAJ before; can you tell us about that period of your life and work?

I think the international strategies developed by CAJ at that time were important. Using the UN Committees to raise Britain's human rights obligations, taking Article 2 cases to Europe, lobbying in the US were all instrumental in bringing external pressure onto the UK government. We were able to mobilize considerable interest and scrutiny putting civil servants and diplomats under more severe criticism and scrutiny in relation to Northern Ireland than they had felt for some time. Along with the eventual developments in the peace process, it was a happy coincidence of factors which allowed for considerable attention to human rights in the subsequent Belfast Agreement.

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Tell us what you have been doing since you left the CAJ?

When I left in 1995, I worked for NIACRO on criminal justice and penal reform issues. I was also involved in developing restorative justice projects with loyalist and republican ex-prisoners. Most recently I have been working for the last 9 years for Coiste na n-Iarchimí, the republican ex-prisoners' network.

I worked on this new project developing this network as a vehicle for the emergence of republican activists and former prisoners into civil society. As well as advocating equality for ex-prisoners (both loyalist and republican) we developed training programmes for our members in organizational management, political reflection, skills transference from involvement in a campaign of violence to community development, dialogue and political engagement.

I was particularly pleased with the relationship building we were able to carry out with people from a unionist and protestant background. It is now widely accepted that Coiste played an important role in transforming mindsets within the republican community in support of the peace process as well as reducing the demonisation heaped on political ex-prisoners with external partners.

Most recently, I was proud of our involvement in the development of the Ex-prisoner Consortium, a joint project with UDA/UFF, UVF/RHC, Official Republican and Socialist Republican activists. I think this is a unique example of the way we can work together in an atmosphere of equality and respect that would have been impossible without the contact and dialogue worked at over the years by staff in Coiste and partners in other groups.

How would you respond to the query about the "match" between your work at Coiste and move back to CAJ?

At heart, both organizations are concerned with rights and equality. All political ex-prisoners be they republican or loyalist have an interest in an end to the discrimination they face. They have also experienced the sharp end of the criminal justice and penal systems. All this is relevant to human rights advocacy in CAJ. Moreover, the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement showed that human rights and political prisoners both have their place in formal negotiations after conflict. Getting it right in regard to both is important for peacebuilding. But both areas of work are I think, about developing partners for peace. CAJ has built important alliances with unexpected allies. I look forward to participating in this.

What are the issues you see as most important for CAJ now?

There are many more actors on the human rights stage these days. This is good to see. Also the most egregious

violations commonly associated with conflict do not take place to the same extent. This means that there is a more diffuse landscape. However, with local politicians now having a say over spending and policy decisions, it will be important that these issues are monitored from a human rights point of view. Also we need to keep pushing energetically for the highest standards in the administration of justice. With the human rights and equality architecture in place, there is a danger that we will develop a bureaucratic approach focusing on the letter rather than being imbued with the spirit of respect and human rights.

The developments around the Bill of Rights are significant. I think there has undoubtedly been a higher than ever level of engagement by all shades of political opinion than heretofore through the Bill of Rights Forum. Tracking its report and then the work of the Commission developing its advice to government on the will be significant areas of work.

Finally, we all need to keep an eye on developments around the "War on Terror". This is the area of rhetoric than has the capacity to undermine all hard won advances in human rights protection. When I was last in CAJ, we used to highlight the dangers around 7 day detention. Now the police in England and Wales regularly call for 90 day detention. And we have 28 day detention in place. This is an indication of the dangers.

What strengths do you bring to the Directorship at CAJ?

I suppose I have a long experience in working on issues around rights, equality and empowerment. I also have a strong commitment to developing efficiency and effectiveness in organizations. I often think that less can be more if the less that we do "hits the spot" and makes its point. But these things can't happen without first class staff and committed members and good governance. Having these resources means that my job will be easy!

What do you like to do when you are not working on human rights' issues?

I have three daughters: Méabh, Róisín and Aoife. They are, respectively, studying journalism in London, law in Glasgow and a variety of A levels in Belfast. Tracking their progress gives me most delight in life.

I also love hill-walking for its exercise and companionship – though I've found nothing in Ireland to match the magnificence and wilderness of the mountains in Scotland!!! Watching films is also a delight, particularly after a fine home-cooked meal and a glass of good red wine!

Conversation between CAJ's new Director Mike Ritchie and Fionnuala ni Aolain Just News editor

Women in One World

International Women's Day was marked in Derry/Londonderry with the launch of "The Art of Survival, International and Irish Quilts" exhibition.

Mayor Alderman Drew Thompson opened the launch at the Verbal Arts Centre and said he was honoured to open such a creative and international exhibition and was sure it would be of great interest locally, especially given the city's textile history...

"These quilts are a very visual expression of so many life experiences.....the creativity expressed in these quilts is testimony to the determination of women across the world."

Gaby Franger opened the Tower Museum section of the exhibition with a video depicting 2000 years of quilt making. She explained that every project has a history and "The Art of Survival: Fabric Images of Women's Daily Lives" is permanently housed in the Regional and International Museum of Women's Culture in Germany.

The exhibition of over 50 quilts includes a range of International and Irish quilts handcrafted by women from various countries such as Germany, Palestine, India, Peru, Zimbabwe and Croatia and Ireland. Although a substantial part of the international exhibition will be displayed at the Tower Museum, 26 Irish quilts will be on display in various cultural venues participating in the "Creating a Quilt Trail" across the city.

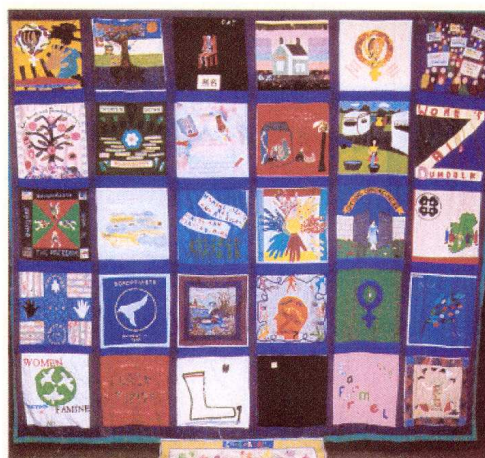
Roberta Bacic from Chile, now living in Northern Ireland, gave a brief presentation on the introduction of the Arpillera movement and how women used this form of art to communicate in secret during the Pinochet regime between 1973 – 1990. An arpillera is a small tapestry created by sewing or gluing different materials together to create a pictorial scene. For example, one striking arpillera entitled "Peace, Justice, Freedom" demonstrates a protest by women, and was made from material from the trousers of a "disappeared" man, and likewise a fabric "road" comes from a disappeared loved one's shirt (see below).



"Peace, Justice, Freedom"

Universal method of story telling

As part of the exhibition, CAJ is delighted that the "Quilt for Beijing" (on show at The Junction, Bishop Street, Derry) forms part of this international exhibition to run until 19th April 2008. CAJ's quilt was created by women from the North and South of Ireland in preparation for the 4th United Nations World Conference on Women, in Beijing 1995, and has travelled throughout Ireland as a tool for discussion among women's groups on matters such as housing, education, domestic violence, peace and human rights.



"Quilt for Beijing"

All other Irish quilts are displayed at the Harbour Museum, Workhouse Museum, Verbal Arts Centre, The Void Gallery, The Playhouse, The Diocesan and the Museum of Free Derry.

Some of the quilts on display tell very painful and moving stories, others depict women's struggles and courage while also helping to preserve memories and understanding of how interesting and important documenting a person's history and heritage can be.

Finally, this exhibition must be seen by all, men, women and children – it is too good to miss – amazing handicraft!

Liz McAleer

Anyone interested in booking the "Quilt for Beijing" for exhibition, should contact the CAJ office (028) 90961122.

The Art of Survival, International & Irish Quilts Exhibition
8th March – 19th April 2008 Derry City Council Heritage & Museum Service

For further information contact www.derrycity.gov.uk/museums or 028 7137 2411.

Review

Judges, Transition and Human Rights:

This collection is a fitting, fascinating and appropriately scholarly tribute to the work of Stephen Livingstone and provides strong encouragement to follow his lead in speaking “truth to power” and retaining integrity in pursuit of protecting the vulnerable and marginalised.

These 25 essays offer insights for jurisdictions in transition or conflict, are vital and challenging reading for policy makers and a range of other specialists and activists and, importantly, also focus on other actors at national and international level who contribute to making rights real in practice.

Contributors have drawn on international and local research, intellectual enquiry, ECHR case law and human rights campaigns in posing slightly new analyses or angles on familiar issues such as integrated education, slopping out, truth recovery, rule of law and ‘war’ on terror. Some essays focus on the links between development, poverty and human security, women’s rights as human rights and judicial roles in promoting the transformative potential of human rights frameworks, law and culture.

The thrust of the collection engages with tensions and contradictions in the discourses of law, criminology and of rights to assess their transformative impact. While acknowledging the limits to the relevance of rights as agents of change, it elucidates points at which change has been led or influenced by rights and also highlights the potential for impact when various sectors co-operate using a mix of approaches.

In “A View from the Coalface”, CAJ stalwarts Maggie Beirne and Angela Hegarty spell out the breadth and value of lessons from NI to current debates on the relationship of human rights standards to effective security strategies. They describe how a range of security driven, state approaches sidelined due-process concerns and eroded rights over the past 40 years. Recapping on some of those is startlingly relevant to current ‘war on terror’ methods.

The authors dispel notions of NGO naivety in acknowledging that not all limitations on one’s liberty are unacceptable but they insist security policies comply with the international human rights principles of necessity, proportionality and non-discrimination, especially given the ‘clamour for quick-fix security results’ and understandable public demands for action.

Beirne and Hegarty also outline why, in a divided society riven with violence, CAJ adopted a neutral political stance on the constitutional status of NI as well as a primary focus on state actors. Despite criticism, this clear mandate

enabled consistent and impartial positions, rooted in objective international standards, to be taken on a range of very difficult issues. In this way, human rights activists are an essential part of the struggle for democracy.

Ní Aoláin and Bell continue these themes in the ‘Battle for Transitional Justice.’ Their research examines the same contradictory ‘security first’ approach which purports to defend the very freedoms that are being removed with the use of even more draconian measures. They evidence how transitional justice is not a neutral concept or confined to dealing with the past.

The battle for hegemony or dominance through ideological redefinition of what international human rights law requires includes derogations or departures from agreed standards, for example in relation to torture in Guantanamo or Iraq and in terms of reduced levels of liability or accountability that privilege the behaviour of democratic over non democratic States.

However, the authors also point to the resilience of human rights norms as evidenced by the lack of acceptance by the international community of US redefinition of standards on torture or use of force. They stress the need for ongoing advocacy of the use of international human rights norms to ‘anchor’ peace processes and assist transition to the rule of law as also a pragmatic way of doing business in a democracy.

Writing about the linkages and interdependence of security and human rights, Kevin Boyle notes that work carried out by Kofi Annan and Armatya Sen explores the need for future UN and national policies to address the complications of a globalised world, and to view human rights both as ends in themselves and a bridge to link other challenges such as security and development.

Boyle hopes that initiatives from global civil society and different social movements working on topics such as the environment, peace and democracy, will help to build a common platform to push for integrated thinking on the goals of security, human rights and development for all. Education has an important role in this.

In a case-study of children’s rights and human rights education in NI, McEvoy and Lundy demonstrate how the combined potential of educational strategies with constitutional or judicial efforts can contribute to a human rights culture. However, success in terms of children’s right to equal access to education has further embedded the separatist approach to schooling and brings new challenges for securing children’s rights through education. Central to this will be the underpinning of a new curriculum with a human rights paradigm within which to frame issues related to the divided nature of NI, whether within a segregated or integrated education system.

Essays in Memory of Stephen Livingstone

A number of essays offer pointers to how governance and administrative practice might be strengthened by applying human rights standards to risk assessment and management as well as in setting policy priorities.

In an interesting analysis of why lawyers and criminologists have neglected the relationship between risk and rights, Murphy & Whitty argue risk assessment is not neutral and that different perspectives on risk tend to justify different regulatory approaches.

They examine the range of 'risk' and rights knowledges assimilated into the reasoning, based on ECHR Articles 2, 3 & 5, in the Napier judgement for its impact on 'slopping out' in Scottish prisons. The judge found the Scottish executive (rather than the prison governor or the Prison Service) was legally accountable for causing harm because Scottish executive policy effectively determines where prisoners are held and in what conditions.

The authors suggest the lasting effect of Napier may be to force not just the Scottish administration but the Scottish public sector generally to conduct organisational risk assessments in ways that acknowledge the complexity of legal risk in a rights culture.

The case also suggests that NGO and non-professional knowledges can play an important role in promoting a human rights culture and in the challenging area of implementation and enforcement. The nature of legal risk affecting public sector organisations in the new human rights culture in the UK also raises some very interesting questions for NI's project of building democracy with human rights compliant policies, priorities and procedures.

Several essays address broader questions of separation of powers, of parliamentary sovereignty or the importance of parliamentary scrutiny of human rights institutions. In discussing the concept of separation of powers in a global context, Flannery argues that judges' participation in transnational networks and dialogue might help to counter a shift in power to the executive and away from the judiciary and the protection of fundamental rights at a domestic level.

Murray Hunt explores constitutionalism in the UK, still largely viewed as a clash between a parliamentary supremacy (democratic positivism) and a judicial supremacy (liberal constitutionalism). Hunt argues there is a need to reflect the 'changing nature and locus of power' because of increased public responsibilities in private hands and the emergence of new forms of legal orders. The considerable progress towards a 'culture of justification' is a genuine cause for celebration, he contends.

Other valuable contributions include McCrudden's timely reflections on the limitations of international human rights concepts in a complex domestic context. Growing fragmentation of these systems can lead to 'forum shopping' where objective legal norms or procedures are open to interpretation and use depending on the interpreters and context. The author scrutinises how this has affected whether rights protecting 'identity and community' rather than 'minorities' should be included in a Bill of Rights arising out of obligations under the Council of Europe Framework Convention on National Minorities. He cautions against 'over-egging the legal pudding' by claiming too much for it.

McEvoy and Rebouche's article on the role of professionals, especially lawyers and their associations, in political, social and legal transformation echoes this with extensive research in NI and other jurisdictions. Rather than maintaining an untenable and impossible neutrality, a framework based on international human rights norms might lend confidence to engage in the conversations without being aligned politically, they argue.

Globally, systematic differences in the situation of men and women were neglected by human rights systems and agendas until separate campaigns led to women's rights being seen as human rights. Meehan's article discusses the varied reasons why women's groups around the world use international standards despite the risks of universalism and the limitations of human rights systems. Among the reasons is the failure of democratisation to bring gender equality in some states in transition.

Meehan argues that grassroots women working across the divide in Northern Ireland created the conditions to place a human rights and equality agenda on the table. The combination of linkage with global networks to lobby human rights bodies, grassroots approaches and mechanisms like the statutory Equality Duty and UN resolution 1325 (recognising women as women) led to greater 'discursive' impact and profile of women in the short term. It also contributed to women's activism to influence the design of devolved institutions in NI (and achieved surprising impact on the drafting of a European constitutional treaty).

This collection of essays reinforces the conclusion that such a combination of legal and judicial channels with policy and grassroots approaches has most potential to deliver a human rights culture. Stephen's work embodied all those dimensions.

Nuala Kelly (in conjunction with Maeve Ni Liathain)

John Morison, Kieran McEvoy & Gordon Anthony (eds) 2007.

Civil Liberties Diary

4 Feb Unionists mount a protest at Banbridge District Council after the local council agrees to undertake an equality impact assessment of its offices. Protestors are concerned that the process will strip the Council offices of military plaques and end the flying of the Union Jack.

5 Feb MEP Jim Allister criticises the direction the Bill of Rights Project is taking. He is concerned that the NIHRC is seeking to distinguish Northern Ireland from Britain and is seeking "equivalence of rights" with the Republic.

6 Feb MLA Michelle McIlveen raises concerns in the Assembly about possible exploitation of migrant workers in Northern Ireland employed under the Work Permit Scheme. She said many agencies that are set up are very poorly monitored by the Office of Immigration Services Commission.

Concerns over the safety and stability of armoured Land Rovers used by the PSNI are raised at the inquest into the death of Constable Siobhan McCann.

8 Feb The Policing Board has considered and agreed terms of reference for the independent external review of the Omagh bombing investigation. A panel of independent experts is to be appointed despite opposition from some of the relatives of those killed.

A tribunal investigating alleged Garda collusion in the murder of two RUC officers in 1989 is to go to the High Court in Dublin to seek possession of a Cabinet document referring to the killings. The Smithwick tribunal has written to inform it is seeking to overturn a claim to Cabinet confidentiality.

12 Feb Coroner Brian Sherrard speaks out in the media urging witnesses who were present when Derry man Dermott McShane was knocked down and killed by an Army Land Rover during rioting in July 1996.

14 Feb NGOs in the Republic warn that the Immigration, Residence and Protection Bill could breach provisions of the Irish Constitution and Ireland's international human rights obligations. Among the criticisms are the provision for summary deportation and detention is unnecessary; there is inadequate protection for separated children; the denial of the right to marry; and the right to access to justice is restricted through new limits on access to judicial review and threats to lawyers in unsuccessful cases.

High Court in Belfast hears that a management review was swept through at the Assembly in a bid to remove three Catholic civil servants from high-ranking posts. Lawyers for the three allege that a cross-party body of Stormont MLAs treated them differently from a senior Protestant colleague. They are seeking a judicial review of the decision.

18 Feb An online poll commissioned by the Human Rights Consortium shows strong cross-community support for a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. There was also strong support for the Bill from both women and men.

20 Feb Taoiseach Bertie Ahern says that the British security services are refusing to hand over papers that would establish if they knew in advance about the killing of solicitor Pat Finucane in 1989. Speaking in the Dail he voiced frustration that the British government had not become more willing to co-operate since Tony Blair stood down.

21 Feb Elizabeth Van Stone, who was injured in an IRA bomb on Bloody Friday in 1972, condemns the expenses involved in the Saville Inquiry. In an interview with the Newsletter she said the British government did not treat victims of all atrocities equally. This follows the announcement that the current cost of the Inquiry stands at £181m.

22 Feb A UN report has been launched looking into religion and belief in

Northern Ireland, exploring in particular the issue of sectarianism. The report was produced by the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion following a visit here in June of last year. The study highlights inequalities in labour, housing, education, policing and criminal justice agencies.

25 Feb The Billy Wright Inquiry hears that RUC Special branch never alerted the NI Prison Service to the INLA plot to murder the LVF leader in the Maze prison in 1997. MI5 initially received the information and passed it on to Special Branch just days before the murder.

26 Feb Michelle Williamson lodges a legal challenge at the High Court in Belfast against the appointment of the four new victims' commissioners. She is opposed to the appointment of four commissioners rather than one as originally planned and also comments made by Commissioner Patricia McBride.

28 Feb Police patrols in Portadown after a recent upsurge in racist attacks. The PSNI has received reports of 15 racially motivated incidents in the Killycomaine area since the New Year, the majority of which are directed against Eastern European residents.

Compiled by Mark Bassett from various newspapers

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Human Rights in Northern Ireland

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