

Gender Matters ?

According to the most recent NI Census (2001), women make up 51.25% of society here. One would therefore have expected that in the most recent elections, we would see lists of candidates for each constituency that roughly reflected the breakdown of society. Sadly not - females made up a mere 20% of candidates. A brief look at the various constituencies shows an average of only 1 or 2 female candidates each. It is hardly surprising therefore that of the 18 candidates finally selected, only 3 (16%) made it to Westminster.

Unfortunately such depressing statistics are not new. Research carried out recently by Louise O'Meara and Maire Crawley for the Women's Research & Development Agency and Women Educating for Transformation provides an excellent gender audit of public life in Ireland north and south, as well as England, Scotland and Wales. It is worth prefacing these statistics by noting that the international minimum requirement for participation by women in public life is a 60/40 ratio. In that context, the figures for representation in government in each of these areas are particularly shocking:

NI Assembly	17%
Dail Eireann	14%
Seanad Eireann	17%
House of Commons	18%
Scottish Assembly	39%
Welsh Assembly	50%

Only Wales and Scotland manage to achieve the international minimum requirement. To say that the others fall short is to understate. The figures for local government representation in Northern Ireland do not fare much better. Up until the last local government election earlier this month, females represented only 19% of the total local councillors. Antrim, Ballymoney and Dungannon had no female councillors at all. CAJ has not yet had time to analyse the most recent election results, but we suspect the picture is not much brighter.

When one considers that councils go on to nominate representatives to various public bodies (such as District Policing Partnerships, Education and Library Boards etc.), the knock-on effect of this lack of female representation in public life can be clearly seen. Perhaps the recent example of the Republic of Ireland could be followed whereby all recommendations for appointment to public bodies must now consist of a male and female candidate. Although the government then has ultimate responsibility for choosing the successful candidate, the ability to more closely analyse and criticise the number of females making it on to these bodies should serve as a forceful deterrent to the present bias in favour of male appointments.

On their own these statistics are worrying. However, taken in the context of a number of other factors they are even more striking. Most relevant here is arguably the particular emphasis placed on women in public life in the Agreement. The section on Rights, Safeguards and Equality of Opportunity states that the parties affirm in particular *"the right of women to full and equal political participation"*. Under Economic, Social and Cultural issues, the British government commits itself to pursuing broad policies for promoting social inclusion, including in particular *"the advancement of women in public life"*.

Another factor is the Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act 2002 which enables parties to reduce inequality in the numbers of men and women elected as representatives of their party. Unfortunately this is a piece of permissive rather than enforceable legislation – in light of the figures above an argument could clearly be made for stricter enforcement.

Finally, there is a raft of international law and policy on women's rights which pays specific attention to the participation of women in political life. In the following pages of this special "gender" edition of Just News, we analyse some of the recent developments around women's rights at a local, national and international level. However, until an issue as fundamental as adequate representation of women in political life is addressed, the words of political parties and governments here on gender matters will continue to ring hollow.

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Seminar: Women's Equality: International Standards – Local Strategies

The Ad Hoc Women's Policy Group consists of a wide range of organisations from the voluntary, statutory, and trade union sectors. It also has a cross-border dimension, with the involvement of the National Women's Council of Ireland and Women Educating for Transformation. The group was highly active during the consultation on OFMDFM's cross-departmental 'Gender Matters' strategy, making plain its disquiet on the limitations of the strategy by providing a widely circulated Briefing Paper.

It was felt that a constructive approach to the next stage of the gender strategy would be to organise an event that would set out the international benchmarks for women's rights that our local strategy should emulate, while providing an opportunity for discussion between policy makers and representatives of voluntary organisations. As the Irish government is also in the early stages of developing a National Women's Strategy, it was agreed that this would be an all-Ireland event, providing for a sharing of ideas and best practice. As the Beijing +10 event had recently taken place in New York, those who had attended that event from the Northern Ireland Women's European Platform and the National Women's Council of Ireland were asked to provide a report back so that seminar participants would have a context for discussion on how our national strategies are meeting international commitments.

The seminar 'Women's Equality: International Standards – Local Strategies' took place on 28 April. It was attended by almost 80 participants from the north and south of Ireland, representing a wide range of organisations, including older women, disabled women, and ethnic minority women, whose multi-identities are currently excluded from the gender strategy. Brenda Campbell as the keynote speaker provided an informative overview of the importance of CEDAW and the Beijing Platform for Action as international benchmarks for the elimination of gender inequality. She was followed by Kate McCullough for NIWEP and by Therese Murphy

for NWCI. The difficulties in maintaining the agreements reached in Beijing were graphically illustrated by examples of American determination to turn Beijing +10 into an anti-abortion event. While they were outnumbered and outmanoeuvred by the rest of the world, the outcome was that no new advances could be agreed in an atmosphere where it was important to defend the gains of Beijing.

The afternoon discussion saw Dermot Kilgallon of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform outline the approach being taken in developing an Irish strategy that would be 'Beijing in an Irish context', high level and strategic and relevant to all women. It was clear that the Irish government has no difficulty with the concept of a specific women's strategy. Mary Bunting, on behalf of OFMDFM, provided a robust defence of the work of the Gender Unit, expressing her 'disappointment' at the negative feedback they had received in the consultation response. However, she stated that the responses would be 'taken on board' and she suggested a future meeting with those in the 'gender equality sector' to discuss the way forward. Margaret Ward, speaking on behalf of the Ad Hoc Policy Group, replied that the strength of the response was a measure of women's determination to have a policy that was radical and inclusive and which acknowledged the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland in ensuring that women had an equal role in the task of conflict resolution and reconstruction. Joanna McMinn for NWCI concluded by outlining what a

strategy for women should contain, emphasising the importance of political will in ensuring that a strategy would be developed, resourced and implemented.

The final discussion of the seminar provided the opportunity for an open and honest exchange of views regarding the limitations of the gender strategy and the misuse of Section 75 in ignoring women's multi-identities because of an assumption that a gender strategy could only be about ensuring that women received equal treatment to men. Participants voiced their frustration at the 'gender neutral' approach of policy makers and the failure to accept that equality of outcomes rather than equal treatment defined the spirit and reality of S75. OFMDFM appeared reluctant to move beyond an equal opportunities model, but did support the use of positive action and promised that UN Resolution 1325 would be considered in the next stage of the strategy. Their defence of the approach taken was that they had been mandated by politicians to produce a gender strategy, not a strategy for women. Given the fact that the UK government has endorsed the Beijing Platform and is a signatory to CEDAW, this argument needs to be explored further. Overall, it was an important and timely seminar which highlighted the need for engagement with policy makers, and which illustrated the strength of including an all-island dimension within the discussion. A full report of the event will be published.

***Margaret Ward
Women's Support Network***

Government's gender strategy has several failings

Gender inequalities continue to exist in Northern Ireland: the gender pay gap, the unequal burden of work in the home and family, the gender segregation in the workforce, the fact that women are more at risk of poverty and of being 'economically inactive', the imbalance in decision-making, the under-representation for women in political and public life and the high incidence of domestic violence against women...

In October 2004: OFMDFM published a consultation document "Gender Matters—a gender equality strategy for Northern Ireland". The consultation document sets out proposals for the development of a new cross-departmental strategic framework to tackle gender inequalities and promote gender equality in Northern Ireland. The document suggests five pillars of action: increasing awareness and understanding of gender inequality and gender differences, removing barriers to equality of opportunity, providing protection, promoting representation and participation, and promoting respect, recognition and positive valuing.

CAJ and many other organisations were invited to give their views on the proposed Gender Equality Strategy. CAJ in common with other organisations such as the Ad-Hoc Women's Policy Group and NICVA, finds the Document generally very disappointing and have many concerns about Government's gender strategy.

Firstly, the strategy falls short of fulfilling obligations under international treaties such as the UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform of Action.

Secondly the focus on the strategy is misplaced in trying to address a notion of gender inequality in a way that excludes other dimensions affecting women's lives. For example, the current vision includes some of the 9 categories listed in Section 75 (such as marital status, parents and carers), but does not include women in all their different and multiple identities, such as age, ethnicity, disability and sexual orientation. However, for most women, it will be a combination of their gender and/or ethnicity/ religion/age etc that will result in their lack of equality.

Furthermore a Gender Strategy should have recognised that the primary issue in relation to gender inequality is the structural disadvantage faced by women and the operation of policies and practices that serve to marginalize and exclude women.

A specific example of another missed opportunity lies in the document's failure to examine the issue of multiple disadvantages. One of the most effective ways to address

the inequalities women face is to look at, for example, the particular health problems facing ethnic minority women, or the economic position of older women who did not benefit from national insurance contributions, or the isolation of women who have particular caring responsibilities. Gender Matters does not advance the interests of some of the most vulnerable members of society. The proposals omit race, sexual orientation, political opinion, religion, disability and age and thus ignore the needs of the most marginalized women and girls.

Generally, CAJ has a concern about the tendency within OFM/DFM to create strategies that are ostensibly designed to address inequalities and disadvantage, but singularly fail to do so. This is, in CAJ's view, partly due to an over-compartmentalisation of the thinking about equality within government (compartmentalisation of both staff and of strategies). However, to compartmentalise the different issues prevents any discussion of multiple identity concerns. This approach totally ignores the reality that the experience of female Catholics and Protestants, old and young, etc. are all quite distinct and a Gender Strategy worthy of the title must address these many different needs. Women from an ethnic minority background will be an after-thought in both the gender and the race strategies, and as a consequence are likely to fall between stools. Moreover, CAJ thinks that there is a clear imperative on central government to show some immediate results in relation to the range of inter-departmental strategies operating across the Section 75 groups.

Thus, CAJ does not believe that the current Gender Strategy has the potential to tackle the many areas of discrimination suffered by women in order to achieve equality in practice between women and men. What is needed is a new strategy that recognizes the international commitments and the structural disadvantage faced by women, a global strategy integrating a Section 75 approach and a real cross-departmental and cross-sectoral analysis of structural inequalities.

Helene Renault
Intern from "Sciences-po" the Institute of Political Studies of Rennes

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 the CAJ office.

The clippings are also available for
consultation in the office.

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

CEDAW and The Irish Human Rights Commission

Part of the mandate of the Irish Human Rights Commission is to ensure that persons in Ireland enjoy the rights which are guaranteed to them by international agreements to which the State is a party.

One such international agreement is the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Ireland became party to this Convention in 1985, and at present some 180 States in the world are Parties to it.

Under CEDAW, States Parties condemn discrimination against women in all its forms and agree to pursue a policy of eliminating discrimination against women. To this end they have committed themselves to take all appropriate measures in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field. Appropriate measures may include temporary special measures aimed at accelerating *de facto* equality between women and men and such measures shall not be regarded as discriminatory.

The Convention provides for the establishment of an international Committee (the CEDAW Committee) to which States Parties are expected to report every five years on the progress they have made in implementing the provisions of the Convention. Ireland's next report will be examined by the Committee on 13 July 2005.

In this context, the Commission has produced and submitted to the CEDAW Committee a "Shadow Report" to assist the Committee in its examination of the official State Report, prepared by the Government. The Commission's aim is to provide the Committee with comprehensive and critical information on specific areas of law and practice where, in the view of the Commission, the Government is not fully complying with its international legal obligations under CEDAW.

In drawing up its Report, the Commission decided to address a select number of topics and to listen to what other relevant bodies, particularly in the NGO sector, were saying. It also devoted its public consultation meeting in Limerick in April 2004 to its proposed Shadow Report and invited a member of the CEDAW Committee, Dr. Beate Schöpp-Schilling, to address the meeting. The topics on which the Commission chose to concentrate are:

- a review of the Irish Constitution from a gender perspective
- a review of Ireland's methods of monitoring progress on the implementation of its obligations under CEDAW
- women and poverty
- women with disabilities
- migrant women and women of racial and ethnic minorities
- older women

A number of common issues emerge from the Commission's analysis of law and practice in these areas. In general, progress in achieving substantive equality for women in Ireland is slow, and this is in part due to the low level of political priority afforded the matter. Also, the measures that are in place to promote the advancement of women are inadequate and piecemeal. There is furthermore a lack of visibility and awareness of the situation of diverse groups of women in Irish society. This is illustrated in the lack of data and research on many of these groups and in the lack of programmes to address their particular concerns. The effects of the formal legal barriers to women's equality that existed until the recent past are still felt in the disadvantaged situation of older women. Moreover, there continues to be an emphasis on the stereotypical role of women as mothers and carers both within the Irish Constitution and within economic, social and cultural life in general.

The Commission will send a delegation to the U.N. in New York for the consideration by the CEDAW Committee on 13 July of Ireland's most recent Report. In this regard, it held a roundtable on 22 April 2005 with other Irish participants in this international treaty-monitoring process and will continue to liaise in New York with those who also send representatives to the CEDAW hearing. This is in line with the Commission's commitment to consultation, dialogue and co-operation, as appropriate, with other bodies working to protect and promote human rights in Ireland.

The CEDAW Committee cannot order the Irish Government to do anything. But it can, and does, make suggestions to States Parties as to how they might improve the fulfilment of their obligations under the Convention. Through its Shadow Report, its co-operation with other relevant human rights organisations, its representations to the CEDAW Committee during the consideration of Ireland's Report and its monitoring of the implementation by the Government of whatever recommendations the Committee makes, the Commission hopes to contribute in some small way not only to the elimination of discrimination against women in Ireland but also to the advancement of equality between women and men and to raise awareness of the Convention and its international monitoring procedure both among interested parties and among the public at large.

***Dr. Alpha Connelly
Chief Executive of the Irish Human Rights Commission***

Ireland in the spotlight

2005 marks a significant year in the calendar of women's human rights. It is the 10th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action and it is the year when the Irish government will be examined by the CEDAW Committee on their progress in implementing the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women.

CEDAW is the first convention to comprehensively address women's rights within political, economic, social, cultural, and family life. It articulates the inadequacy of the international human rights system to protect women's human rights and combat discrimination. CEDAW is a radical document that aims to change and transform the structural barriers to equality. Rather than just adding to the list of rights already covered by other treaties, it emphasizes the importance of changing the system within which women's rights are violated. In identifying and eliminating the obstacles, States may even introduce "*temporary affirmative action measures*" until equality between women and men is achieved. (Article 4)

CEDAW Shadow Report

One of the priorities of the Women's Human Rights Alliance, since its establishment in 2002, has been raising awareness of CEDAW among women's groups and organisations. This work has been particularly timely since the Irish government submitted its Combined 4th and 5th Reports to the CEDAW Committee in 2003 and as a result the WHRA have focused on producing a shadow report. An extensive consultation process was carried out which involved regional workshops and interviews with over 150 groups and individuals. The key issues which emerged were health, political representation, barriers to education and employment and violence against women.

Political representation

In relation to political representation the report identifies the key barriers to women's under-representation in politics. The proportion of women elected to the Dail has risen by only 5 per cent in 20 years to 13.25%. Recommendations call on the government to establish a national support structure and to introduce family friendly parliament working practices.

Violence against women

The statistics in the Government's progress report deal only with domestic violence, even though the CEDAW Committee, at the government's last interview, requested comprehensive information on all types of violence. Failure to include more details adds to the invisibility of the problem. Key recommendations call on the government to increase funding for frontline services, to recognise violence

against women as a crime and to take responsibility for ensuring that perpetrators are sanctioned and that women remain safe and attain justice.

Education and employment

Although the number of women in paid employment is rising, much of the work is relatively poorly paid and part time. The report highlights the pay gap, the social-welfare dependency of spouses, the absence of sufficient and affordable childcare; the lack of paid parental leave; and what it describes as a particularly serious omission in the Government's document: no reference to the contribution or value of unpaid work to the economy and community.

Health

Inequalities in health elicited some of the most impassioned contributions during the consultations. The links between poverty, inequality and health are widely acknowledged as a significant challenge, but they are not reflected in the Government's report. The issue of breast and cervical cancer emerged as a core concern for women and the unacceptable delays in nationalising pilot screening programmes. The shadow report also addresses the unresolved abortion issue and calls on the government to introduce legislation to make provision for abortion in circumstances like those in the "X" case which was upheld by the Supreme Court in 1992.

A challenging environment

The shadow report also examines the national context in relation to human rights and reveals that in spite of a commitment on paper to human rights, current government rhetoric and policy demonstrate an opposition to such a commitment in practice. This, together with a growing antifeminist backlash fuelled by groups who are opposed to a feminist agenda, combine to create an extremely challenging environment for the implementation and monitoring of CEDAW.

Many NGOs are currently planning to travel in New York to attend the 33rd CEDAW session. It is hoped the Irish government will be put under pressure to move from the rhetoric to the implementation of its international obligations in relation to women's rights. The challenge will be to get the concluding comments widely disseminated and used by women's groups in their own lobbying and campaigning work. CEDAW is a powerful tool but only if we are using it in our everyday work - in the words of one of the members of the CEDAW Committee 'we should be quoting it left, right and centre'.

Nóirin Clancy
Women's Human Rights Alliance

Domestic Violence is not a shame, it is a crime

“Domestic Violence is a Shame” is an unacceptable slogan – it should instead read “Domestic Violence is a Crime”. This dichotomy between popular conceptions of domestic violence and its reality is the powerful message conveyed on beer mats produced some time ago by the Ashton Centre and Women’s Aid Helpline. It is a simple but important message, relayed in an ingenious manner. Whatever learned academic papers, detailed statistics and research projects are established, the bottom line is that domestic violence is a crime and must be tackled effectively by a range of actors.

Currently, according to police statistics, domestic violence accounts for approximately one third of all recorded violent crime in Northern Ireland, and there are on average five domestic violence deaths a year. The PSNI attends an average of 46 domestic related incidents per day, but also notes that there is serious under-reporting of such crime. Such violent incidents often appear to start or escalate during pregnancy, and at least 11,000 children are estimated to be living with domestic violence. Repeat victimisation is common and the British Crime Survey carried out for England and Wales in 2000 suggest that there is no other type of crime that has as high a rate of repeat victimisation.

Yet, at the same time, even the victims themselves often do not categorise domestic violence as a crime. In a recent Northern Ireland Crime Survey (Research & Statistical Bulletin, 5/2005), although 67% of victims sustained physical injuries as a result of their ‘worst’ incident, only 39% of all victims consider their ‘worst’ incident constitutes a crime. 16% of victims accepted such violence as “something that happens”. The issue of perception is extremely important since the same survey notes that the police were unaware of 80% of the worst incidents identified, and that part of the under-reporting problem is explained by the fact that “people are more likely to report domestic violence offences to the police if they conceptualise it as being a crime rather than not a crime”.

Nearly half of all those surveyed believed that government and its agencies – the police, the courts etc. – are not doing enough to address domestic violence.

A recent article in the Journal of the Law Society of Northern Ireland (Jan/February 2005) comments on the advances that have been made in terms of the initial police response to domestic violence but notes that there have at least been improvements in the policing of these crimes whilst “corresponding developments with criminal law practitioners and the criminal courts has been much slower”. There clearly needs to be an assessment of current legislative provisions and penalties, as well as effective training for all those involved in the criminal justice system.

Of course, treating domestic violence as a crime does not mean that it is only criminal justice agencies that need to address the problem. Educational initiatives, appropriate funding for groups working in this domain (including groups working with perpetrators) and the addressing of gender violence in the context of rights’ protections more generally should all be pursued.

Experience at the European and international levels may be relevant to draw upon when government examines how it could tackle the crime of domestic violence more effectively. In the context of its work to promote greater equality between men and women, the Council of Europe

has developed a Plan of Action to combat violence against women and periodically updates a compilation of existing legislation on violence against women in Council of Europe member states. The European Women’s Lobby built upon this by commenting how policy, budgets, legislation, remedies, criminal and civil justice systems, professional training, service provision, gender equality measures, the community and voluntary sector, improved data collection and efforts at prevention should all figure in a government’s Action Plan.

The UN has created a post of Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on violence against women, its causes and consequences. Apart from organising official missions to countries to discuss appropriate state action to counter violence against women, the Rapporteur (Dr Yakin Erturk of Turkey) has made a series of policy recommendations. It is these sorts of issues that are being highlighted in the current campaign that is being organised worldwide by Amnesty International.

Of course the issue of “domestic” violence and violence “against women” are not synonymous. Domestic violence occurs across societies regardless of age, race, religion, politics, wealth, geography or sexual orientation. In the vast majority of reported cases, the violence is perpetrated by men against women (in NI, nearly six times as many women as men are victims of domestic violence according to PSNI statistics); but men also can be victims, and violence can of course occur in same-sex relationships. In all of these scenarios, the challenges faced by the public agencies concerned may be different, but there is no doubt that there is a value in monitoring closely good practice at the European and international levels. Domestic violence is not a shame; it is a crime.

10 Years after Beijing: Keeping Governments to their Promises

2005 marks the tenth anniversary of the United Nations 4th World Conference on Women, otherwise known as the Beijing Conference. At that conference in 1995, 189 countries committed themselves to the equal rights and inherent dignity of women and men and to ensuring the full implementation of the human rights of women. Ten years later, we ask ourselves how far we have progressed.



Let's take a very simple indicator: the law. Laws are explicit statements of government policy. When laws discriminate against women, they symbolize at the most formal level governments' open disrespect for equality. One of the many pledges made at the Beijing Conference was to "revoke any remaining laws that discriminate on the basis of sex". In 2000, governments reaffirmed their commitment to do so, "...preferably by 2005". But now, in 2005, such laws continue to exist, promoting the message throughout society that discrimination against women is acceptable. Despite the proliferation of international human rights standards ratified by many governments that call for women's equality, progress from the rhetoric of promoting women's equal status into reality has been devastatingly slow. Therefore, in light of the continued failure of governments to uphold these commitments, Equality Now launched a campaign calling on governments to repeal all discriminatory laws.

Laws in most corners of the globe and in diverse political systems continue to deny women equal opportunity in education and employment, continue to exclude women from political participation and representation, and continue to deprive women of their sexual and reproductive rights. Laws prevent women from voting in Kuwait or driving in Saudi Arabia; rape laws in India, Malaysia and Tonga, for example, all explicitly exclude forced marital sex; in Pakistan, a woman's word is worth half of a man's as evidence in a court of law; in Nepal, a woman loses her inheritance when she marries; in Chile, the marital partnership is to be headed by the husband. The penal code of Northern Nigeria permits husbands to use physical violence to "chastise" their wives as long as it does not result in "grievous harm." In many countries, including Monaco, Bangladesh, Kenya and the United States, laws promote barriers to citizenship based on the sex of a parent or spouse; in the United Kingdom and Australia, to name two examples, women are excluded from equal opportunity to serve in the military.

These are just some of the numerous abuses that can be legally perpetrated against women around the world. Without

protection under law, women have no recourse when they face violence and discrimination, but even written legal protection is only the first step.

New mechanisms are urgently needed within the UN system to eliminate discrimination against women, whether that discrimination is legalized through a country's codes or otherwise. Progress made since the Beijing Conference was reviewed at the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in March 2005. To support the strong message of implementation of governments' promises to ensure equality between men and women, Equality Now, in coalition with women's and human rights groups from around the world, proposed that the CSW appoint a Special Rapporteur on laws that discriminate against women. The UN Human Rights Commission, the parallel body to the CSW has a plethora of special rapporteurs that examine countries' compliance with international human rights instruments. The CSW has none. A Special Rapporteur appointed by the CSW could engage in dialogue with states regarding laws that discriminate against women and support ongoing efforts to revoke those laws.

The Special Rapporteur could also promote exchange of information among states on issues of common concern and would permit focus on ways in which member states have used law reform effectively to counter discrimination against women. Disappointingly, the CSW did not seize the opportunity to concentrate its efforts on implementation of the promises made a decade ago and reaffirmed five years ago. Although the governments of Rwanda and the Philippines introduced a resolution to consider the advisability of the appointment of a Special Rapporteur, which was adopted during the session, no other concrete proposals were advanced to promote implementation of the Beijing pledges. As an indication of political will and governments' commitment to securing equality for women, this was not an encouraging sign.

The coalition calling for a Special Rapporteur on laws that discriminate against women will however persevere in its campaign to promote and protect the rights of women under the law. To find out how you can join this campaign and help eliminate discriminatory laws, including the ones mentioned above, please go to Equality Now's report *Words and Deeds: Holding Governments Accountable in the Beijing +10 Review Process*: http://www.equalitynow.org/english/wan/beijing10/beijing10_en.html. We need to maintain the pressure on all our governments to turn words into actions in the promotion of an equal society for all.

Equality Now was founded in 1992 to work for the protection and promotion of the human rights of women around the world.

Civil Liberties Diary

1 May Minister for Overseas Co-operation, Conor Lenihan, said Ireland will reach a UN target (0.7% GNP) for overseas aid by 2012.

An independent human rights audit of An Garda Síochána has found that procedures and operating practices within the force “can lead to institutionalised racism” particularly in relation to Nigerians, Travellers and Muslims. Garda Commissioner Noel Conroy accepted the recommendations and hopes to implement them by 2007.

6 May Amnesty International launched its election manifesto and called on Northern Ireland politicians to consider human rights issues.

Anna Lo, director of the Chinese Welfare Association, called on the government to ease ethnic minority inequality.

8 May The Police Board formally approved the introduction of a new type of plastic bullet. CAJ and other human rights groups criticised the decision, which was made without any meaningful consultation.

The Inquiries Bill, which would allow some public inquiry evidence to be heard in private, passed through its final stages to become law. The family of murdered solicitor Pat Finucane said it was highly unlikely they would co-operate with any inquiry established under the new terms.

11 May Jim Allister condemned NIO Minister Ian Pearson after being informed that victims would not be given a special claim in the next round of EU Peace and Reconciliation Funds.

12 May Plans to electronically tag divorced and separated parents who flout child contact orders are “humiliating” and should be dropped from draft legislation a committee of MPs and peers have said.

13 May The multi million pound cost of funding the Police Ombudsman’s Office every year was criticised as out of control by Ken Maginnis.

14 May A north Antrim teenager became the first person in Northern Ireland to be served with an Anti-Social Behaviour Order. The youth now faces restrictions on his/her behaviour and movement over the next eight weeks in the Coleraine Borough Council area.

15 May The Irish government is to contest an action brought by a lesbian couple seeking to have their Canadian marriage recognised in Ireland and to have the Revenue commissioners treat them as married under the Tax Acts.

18 May The Public Inquiry into the murder of solicitor Rosemary Nelson began under Sir Michael Morland in Craigavon.

21 May Amnesty International attacked the new Inquiries Act for curbs on public scrutiny. It called on the judiciary to oppose the new legislation and condemned the government for trying to eliminate independent scrutiny of its agents.

22 May Derry’s top police officer, Richard Russell, has said that there is an increasing willingness among nationalists to use the police, even despite the political stalemate.

25 May Children born into poor families in Britain are less likely to fulfil their potential than in other developed countries. The study from the London School of Economics records the UK as having one of the worst records on social mobility.

25 May An independent report by Combat Poverty shows that despite strong economic growth Ireland continues to be among the nations with the lowest social spending and so continues to have one of the highest poverty rates.

Brain Irwin, of Forensic Science Northern Ireland, said DNA evidence would almost certainly help identify the killers behind unsolved murders under fresh scrutiny by a special police team.

A former British soldier who claimed to have killed six IRA members and had recently given evidence to the Saville Inquiry has been found shot dead in his home. Scotland Yard is investigating the circumstances due to the sensitivity of the case.

The Chairman of Ballymena District Policing Partnership has voiced concern over the penalty imposed on a man convicted of racially abusing and threatening to kill a local resident, Hassan Ibrahim. It is feared that the £300 fine might deter others from coming forward and reporting such incidents.

30 May The family of a Lurgan man shot dead by the PSNI outside Lisburn two years ago visited the Policing Board headquarters to hand in a report on the killing of Neil McConville. They are still waiting for a satisfactory account of what actually happened.

The Office of the First and Deputy First Minister withdrew funding from a west Belfast anti-racist group after it advised minority communities to avoid dealing with the PSNI unless it was necessary.

Compiled by Mark Bassett from various newspapers.



Just News welcomes readers' news, views and comments.

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