

CAJ's Annual General Meeting 2009

The AGM was held this year in Clanmil Housing Association in Waring Street on the 28th October. As a result of feedback received from some members, we had an early evening meeting commencing at 5.30pm and hope that this enabled a greater number of members to attend. We are pleased that almost 40 members, executive committee members, guests and staff were able to attend.

The new style Annual Report received very positive comments during the evening. If you would like a copy please do not hesitate to contact the office.

In his Chairperson's report, Pat Conway spoke about the current external human rights environment including the slow progress of the Bill of Rights and the opportunities presented by devolution. In relation to the organisation, he was pleased to advise that additional staffing resources are now in place to further support the implementation of the Strategic Plan. He also gave an overview of some of the areas of work in which the Committee has been engaged during the year including casework and the Consultative Group on the Past.

Aideen Gilmore, Deputy Director, gave an outline of policy work which has been carried out during the year. The appointment of staff has allowed the initiation of programmes of work around policing and the criminal justice system. Stretched resources in the past, have meant a mostly reactive approach, having dedicated staff means that we can begin to develop proactive lines of work in these important areas. This will be particularly helpful if, as we assume will happen in due course, powers over policing and justice are, finally, transferred to the Stormont Assembly and Executive. She also emphasised that, despite a prevailing discourse that the transition from conflict is complete, important elements of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement remain unenforced.

In the Director's Report, Mike Ritchie welcomed the new members of staff into the areas of Casework, Criminal Justice, Policing, Communications and Finance and Administration. He also welcomed the new Eirene Volunteer, Jakob van Kampen. These appointments have given the organisation additional resources, experience and skills. He also took the opportunity to record the Committee's thanks and good wishes to Tim Cunningham, Equality Programme Officer who, after nine years, is leaving CAJ to complete a PhD. Mike also thanked the part-time volunteers who have worked with CAJ during the year. Their assistance has been invaluable. He was also

pleased to advise that the Human Rights Trust, has purchased new premises in Queen Street Belfast. CAJ will be leasing these premises from the Trust. He looked forward to welcoming everyone in the new premises after the office moves in spring 2010.

Following a short question and answer session, Finegan and Gibson, Chartered Accountants presented the Treasurer's Report and election of the Executive Committee was confirmed with Pat Conway and Barbary Cook elected as Chair and Vice-Chair respectively for a further year.

It was agreed that, because there has not been an increase in the membership fees for some time, these should increase to £25.00 per annum. However, there will be no change to the fees for unwaged members. These will remain at £5.00.

A constitutional amendment which was discussed at last year's meeting was passed unanimously by those in attendance. The amendment involves the transferring of members and assets from CAJ to CAJ Ltd with a consequential dissolution of the unincorporated body.

Following the more formal agenda items of the meeting, we were very pleased to introduce Professor Monica McWilliams, Chief Commissioner of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, who gave a comprehensive and interactive briefing on the current state of play in relation to the Bill of Rights consultation in Northern Ireland.

The meeting ended with some light refreshments, an opportunity for informal discussion and the chance to view the plans for the new premises which were on display.

Contents

CAJ's Annual General Meeting 2009	1/2
CAJ updates	2
Launch of the PILS Project	3
A stock-take: Human Rights and the Agreement - how far have we come?	4/5
CAJ at Westminster	6
Prosecuting Rape in Northern Ireland	7
Civil Liberties Diary	8



Crowd at the AGM

CAJ is seeking assistance with its Criminal Justice Programme.

The work will primarily be concerned with assisting CAJ in its response to criminal justice policy consultations and as such knowledge and expertise of human rights and criminal justice, and research skills are preferred. This work will be conducted on a consultancy basis for one day per week (seven hours per day) for a period of six months initially. For more information on how to tender please visit our website on www.caj.org.uk

International Human Rights Day

To celebrate International Human Rights Day, CAJ will hold a briefing event on responding to the public consultation on the Bill of Rights on 10th December at 1pm in the Group Space, Ulster Hall, Belfast.

This short, informal event will be an excellent opportunity for organisations to find out how to become involved in the public consultation and hear some more on the process to date.

The Northern Ireland Office issued its response to the NIHRC's advice on the Bill of Rights on 30th November.

This seminar will give you the opportunity to hear CAJ's analysis of the government's response, and discuss its implications for other groups and sectors. As such, this will be a timely opportunity to develop your thinking on responding to the consultation.

To register, please email jakob@caj.org.uk or telephone 028 9096 1122.

CAJ's new premises in the making!



Keep an eye out in Just News for pictures of our new offices taking shape.

Launch of the PILS Project

On October 7th Belfast's Waterfront Hall held the launch of the Public Interest Litigation Support Project ("the PILS Project"), an independent organisation seeking to advance human rights and equality in Northern Ireland through public interest litigation. The event hosted Mr Justice Séamus Treacy as speaker.

The PILS Project is unique in Northern Ireland in its intention to focus on strategic litigation as a vehicle for social change. Public interest litigation, or PIL, refers to cases that are taken in the interests of minority or disadvantaged groups, or the broader public. Unlike most other civil cases, PIL cases have the capacity to affect more than those directly involved in the case. They can challenge or clarify the policies, procedures and decisions of public authorities, or provoke the political system into responding to a problem it has hitherto ignored. PIL is distinctive in its ability to provide access to justice to those most in need of it and yet who find themselves furthest from it.

The Project has its roots within the Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ) who first conceived the concept of a dedicated public interest organisation for Northern Ireland. Following the publication of research carried out by the consultancy firm Deloitte, which found an unmet need in Northern Ireland for such an organisation, CAJ submitted the funding proposal to The Atlantic Philanthropies on which the PILS Project is now based.

The organisation has the capacity to provide financial and/or legal support to public interest cases referred by members of its Stakeholder Forum. The Forum is open to all non-governmental, non party-political organisations who fulfil a number of criteria, and aims to enhance awareness and information sharing on public interest litigation between its members, as well as facilitating the identification of potential public interest cases. All potential cases will be considered for support by the PILS Project Board of Trustees against a pre-defined set of criteria.

The PILS Project also aims to work with the legal profession to increase levels of pro bono activity in Northern Ireland and to positively influence the work of the statutory bodies that have a duty to advance human rights and equality. It also seeks to tackle the existing barriers to public interest litigation through the organisation of conferences and seminars, production of publications and other non-litigation based activities.

Chair of the PILS Project Board is Paul Mageean, Solicitor and Director of the Graduate School of Professional Legal Education at the University of Ulster. The Board consists of Fiona Doherty BL, Gerry Hyland, Solicitor, Sam Pollock, Chief Executive of the Office of the Police Ombudsman and Geoff Budlender, South African Advocate and former Director of the Legal Resources Centre. The staff team includes Melissa Murray, Project Manager and Solicitor, Marieanne McKeown, Development Officer, and Mickey Ghanni, Finance Officer.

The launch of the PILS Project is timely in the context of the current economic climate. With the juxtaposition of tightened government budgets against widening patterns of economic disadvantage, it is inevitably the poorest and most disadvantaged who will suffer most. The PILS Project can open up the possibility of litigation-based challenges and legal remedies to, and on behalf of, those individuals

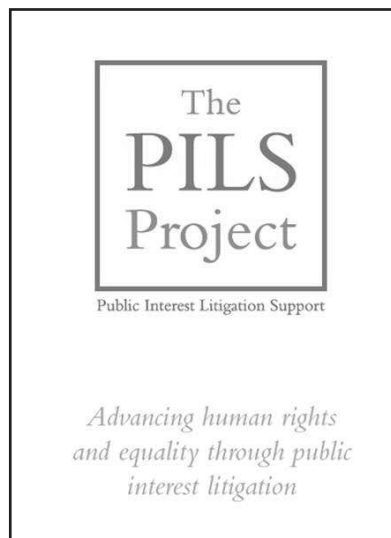
and groups. It can help to bridge the gap between the legal system and those it seeks to protect by utilising human rights and equality laws in a practical and far reaching way.

Previous PIL cases in Northern Ireland taken by other organisations have resulted in the right to transport to school during respite care for a severely disabled young person; a successful challenge to the decision to continue to detain a mental health patient in hospital which was based largely on a lack of adequate suitable community accommodation; and a successful challenge to a Health and Social Services Trust's decision to move an elderly man to a less expensive

residential care home because neither he or his only relative could afford to pay the third party top up charge of £20 per week. While each of these cases were taken on behalf of an individual, they each have an impact on others facing similar circumstances.

The launch drew a large and diverse audience, indicating the widespread level of interest in the PILS Project and the work it will undertake. Mr Justice Treacy addressed the range of legal professionals, NGOs, academics and representatives of statutory bodies, acknowledging the need for litigation in the public interest in Northern Ireland and offering his best wishes for the progress of the Project.

For further information on the work of the PILS Project, or if your organisation would like to become a member of the Stakeholder Forum, please visit our website at www.pilsni.org or contact us on tel: 028 9044 6201 or email: info@pilsni.org.



A stock-take: Human Rights and the Agreement - how far have we come?

The annual Stephen Livingstone lecture hosted by the Law School at Queen's University Belfast was delivered in October this year by Martin O'Brien, Programme Director of Atlantic's Philanthropies' Reconciliation and Human Rights Programme. As a former Director of CAJ, a role in which he was fundamental in advancing campaigns for many of the human rights and equality provisions in the Agreement, Mr O'Brien was extremely well-placed to analyse developments since that critical time for human rights. In his lecture, he pointed to the significant progress that has taken place, but left the audience with a clear message that much remained to be done, particularly in securing the protection of rights for the most marginalised and excluded in our society.

Mr O'Brien began by challenging the much-quoted statement about the devolution of policing and justice being the final piece of the jigsaw in terms of implementation of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement. He argued that view for two reasons. Firstly, that it was clearly inaccurate because it ignored the fact that work on the Bill of Rights has yet to reach fruition. Secondly, and more importantly, it assumes that all those other pieces of the jigsaw that have been implemented are working according to plan and delivering the required change, which he said was not a safe assumption.

Policing and criminal justice

In relation to policing, he pointed to the significant change that has taken place - a new name, uniform, Chief Constable, more Catholic and female recruits, a range of new policies and procedures that address human rights concerns, and a completely independent police complaints system that many other places can only dream of.

However, Mr O'Brien argued it was worth looking more closely at the priority Patten attached to policing with the community and highlighted that the report was clear that community policing means "the police working in partnership with the community; the community thereby participating in its own policing; and the two working together," and that it was emphasised that this was as much a matter of philosophy as one of method. Mr O'Brien expressed the fear that this had not borne true, that we have followed the letter rather than the spirit and as such have not yet succeeded in seeing partnership as a philosophy or an attitude. Therefore, he felt that while policing with the community has become the new mantra for the PSNI, it's clear that partnership is still seen as the police "doing to" rather than "working in partnership with" the community.

Referring to his time in CAJ, Mr O'Brien informed the audience that the changes in policing and criminal justice emanating from the Agreement were hard-fought, and that Stephen had played a central role in this. He found it telling, for example, that those areas of the Criminal Justice Review which were most concerned with increasing transparency and human rights compliance are the ones where least progress has been made. For example, we still do not have an equity monitoring system or a representative workforce strategy for the criminal justice system.

On the administration of justice, Mr O'Brien referred to Stephen Livingstone's argument that we should pay attention to those responsible for running the system. These people can have a huge impact on the culture of institutions and he suggested that Stephen was absolutely right - such cultural change is the hardest and the slowest.

Regarding prisons, Mr O'Brien agreed with Robin Masefield, the Director of the Prison Service who said it is "unacceptable" that a prisoner with a history of attempted suicide and showing signs of distress could hang himself while prison officers failed to pay attention, and he referred to successive reports that point to deep rooted systemic problems that need to be addressed.

A Bill of Rights

Regarding the development of a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland, Mr O'Brien commended those involved for the work they had done, and who saw their brief as building on what already exists and adapting that to the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland. He suggested that it was precisely because they had done their job that they were subjected to attack. He believed that those who argue now that we do not need a Bill of Rights are out of step with ordinary people, and he argued strongly that those of us who have least need of human rights protections, because of our relative privilege, must think twice before undercutting the efforts of others.

Mr O'Brien pointed to the growing numbers of disadvantaged people from across the community who feel much more comfortable with the language of rights as one of the great achievements of the peace process. He felt it was striking that there are such high levels of support across the community for the inclusion of social and economic rights in any Bill of Rights and suggested that in the context of a divided society, government and politicians should be building on this kind of agreement rather than trying to ignore or undermine it.

Equality

In relation to the inequality and socio-economic disadvantage in our society, Mr O'Brien stated that inequalities are growing and the gap is widening. He highlighted that fact that the Agreement made explicit references to tackling social inclusion through community development initiatives, a regional development strategy, targeting social need, tackling the unemployment differential, and addressing the needs of young people, particularly at interface areas. However, statistics show that the historically poorest areas in Northern Ireland are in many cases now relatively worse off than they were during the conflict, which he asserted was not a recipe for long term stability.

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act, which derives directly from the Agreement, had in his view considerable potential to tackle inequality and transform people's lives. He argued that while there are examples of it being used very effectively, this was an area where once again things had become lost in the structures and in method, as very often what one sees are mechanistic "tick-box" exercises in relation to equality impact assessment.

He argued that this is exacerbated by a lack of effective enforcement at both a political and statutory level. For example, he suggested that the Equality Commission has produced complaints procedures for Section 75 which are more complicated than those envisaged by Parliament. He stated that it is absolutely essential for the Commission to be robust in the exercise of its powers as it is charged with holding government and public bodies to account on these issues. He felt that the judgement in the Neill case gave the Commission a significant degree of discretion in how it exerts its Section 75 enforcement powers and that it should make full use of that discretion.

Dealing with the past

The final issue Mr O'Brien touched upon was dealing with the past. He suggested that there needs to be a wide ownership of this process and one in which the needs of victims are placed centre-stage. Regarding the recent report of the Consultative Group on the Past, he said that there did not appear to be widespread ownership or consensus around its recommendations and expressed the views that the entire experience and the political posturing around it has no doubt re-traumatised many victims and probably left them dubious about engaging any further. But, he said, we simply cannot abandon the debate.

He hoped that the awaited reports from the Bloody Sunday Inquiry, and the inquiries into the murders of Billy Wright, Rosemary Nelson and Robert Hamill would provide some comfort for the families and that lessons could be learned from what happened.

He referred to the fact that much of the discourse has been around their considerable cost, which has been cited by

some as a reason not to hold any further inquiries. He felt there was something quite perverse about this because there is a clear correlation between the cost and the state's continued efforts to prevent the truth coming out. So while the cost argument is being used to say there should be no more public inquiries, that in turn means that ministers and governments will not be publicly held to account for their actions. He felt this was a disturbing prospect indeed and one which must be resisted.

Mr O'Brien highlighted that there has been no public inquiry into the murder of Pat Finucane. At an event he attended - with many other international human rights advocates - to mark the 20th anniversary of Pat's death, the family had just received a letter from the UK government saying that ministers were deciding whether it was in the public interest to proceed with a public inquiry. Mr O'Brien expressed the fear that the government is not considering the public interest but rather its own interest in preventing the embarrassment of powerful people.

In closing, Mr O'Brien concluded that while much progress has been made and Northern Ireland is a different place, much remains to be done and the peace process has not reached its goal. In particular he felt that a failure to deliver to marginalised and disadvantaged communities would only store up problems for the future.

He referred to a letter that had been received by CAJ after Stephen's death from Kader Asmal, a former South African Minister, who described Stephen as embodying "a lively, committed, passionate human rights approach to public life." He encouraged us all to follow that example, as it would take us far.

Sarah Lorimer
CAJ volunteer

CAJ at Westminster

As part of CAJ's long-running campaign to secure a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland, we recently organised a briefing in Westminster in partnership with British Irish RIGHTS WATCH. This event was targeted at members of both Houses of Parliament, London based human rights NGOs, academics and legal professionals. The event was intended to inform those in Westminster and its surroundings of the process and debate about a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland to date, CAJ's thinking on what the Bill should look like, and the forthcoming consultation and potential Westminster legislation.

The briefing would ideally have coincided with a consultation document having been issued by the Northern Ireland Office. The date for this consultation has been somewhat of a movable feast - originally to have been launched in spring, then summer, then autumn. We now understand that it will be issued at the end of November (which is at least a specific month as opposed to a season).

Despite not having a consultation document to comment upon, the briefing was extremely useful in informing and updating those present about the process of developing a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland and its location in the settlement of the conflict here. This was particularly important in emphasising its distinction from current debates about a UK Bill of Rights and Responsibilities.

The briefing was well attended and began with a few words from the chair of the event, the Rt Hon David Howarth MP who is the Liberal Democrat Shadow Secretary of State for Justice. Mr Howarth spoke of his friendship with Stephen Livingstone, a former member of CAJ's Executive Committee and a strong supporter of a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland.

Fiona Mc Causland, a member of CAJ's Executive Committee presented a heartfelt picture from the ground

on how using and claiming rights have made a difference in her community, and how a Bill of Rights would cement and further this work. She made a direct appeal for support to enable a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland to proceed.

CAJ's Director Mike Ritchie then outlined the history and process of the debate, and explained why it is so important for people of influence in London to support it. Mike pointed out that if the approach of not acting on a Bill of Rights due to perceived controversy had been adopted in relation to other matters, then nothing would have changed in Northern Ireland since everything that has been done to ensure peace has had some degree of controversy - perceived or otherwise - attached to it. So why should the Bill of Rights be any different? Mike said "*There appears to be a false belief that Northern Ireland would be sorted out*

if policing and justice were devolved. However, if you talk to the people in Northern Ireland, the wounds still exist and sectarianism and violence are never far below the surface. Northern Ireland is limping along and will continue to do so until the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement is fully implemented."



L-R, Chief Commissioner, Monica McWilliams (NIHRC), Alistair Carmichael, Liberal Democrat MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and Scotland and Pat Conway, CAJ Chairperson

Chief
Commissioner
Monica Mc
Williams wrapped

up the main briefing by speaking about the advice on a Bill of Rights presented by the Commission to the Northern Ireland Office and the responsibility on Westminster to implement the Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. She concluded that what was needed now was "*commitment, clarity and completion*".

CAJ looks forward to engaging in the consultation when it is finally issued by the Northern Ireland Office and will continue to engage and build support in Westminster.

Prosecuting Rape in Northern Ireland

The CAJ recently responded to a consultation process initiated by the Public Prosecution Service proposing a Draft Policy for the Prosecution of Rape in Northern Ireland. This policy document is part of a wider strategy across England and Wales delivered in the CPS's policy document entitled *Policy for Prosecuting Cases of Rape*, upon which the PPS's approach heavily relies.

As many are aware, the prosecution of sexual offences generally and rape in particular, has been notoriously difficult in many jurisdictions, including our own. There has been an historical unwillingness by prosecutors to aggressively pursue such cases, allied with enormously high costs for individual victims when cases are taken. These costs include secondary trauma, the re-victimization of the victim through highly masculine and alienating court procedures and the difficulty for certain victims to have their voices heard in legal fora (notably women raped by persons with whom they are in intimate relationships, women who may not conform to idealized notions of virtue, and men who have been raped). In this context, the PPS is to be commended for taking seriously the need to create specific policies to prosecute rape as well as addressing in a systematic way the particular needs of rape victims. It is also to be applauded (para 11.7) for addressing head-on the kinds of myths that pervade legal and social understanding of how and in what contexts rape takes place. Equally useful is the rebuttal of the kinds of stereotypes that abound and the deeply entrenched expectations about the appropriate ways in which victims of sexual violence behave before, during and after violent and non-consensual sexual violations.

CAJ welcomed the draft policy but offered a number of constructive comments on the prosecution of rape, and on the guidelines offered by the PPS. To commence we noted that the policy is specifically focused on rape although the document states (para 1.6) that the "PPS will apply best practices and procedures set out in this document to all other types of sexual offences". We note that women experience a range of sex-based violations that include but are not limited to the crime of rape, and for many women the totality of these experiences may be as fraught as the specific harm of rape. We are concerned that the lack of a broader and systematic approach in the prosecution of sexual harms may create a discrepancy in perception and practice concerning the seriousness of sexual violation. In this context, CAJ specifically advocates that the policy should explicitly apply to cases of non-consensual sexual offences as defined in the Sexual Offences (Northern Ireland) Order 2008, or that a separate (and robust) policy be developed for other sexual offences.

CAJ also suggest that any policy in this area should be measured against international best practice in the arena of victims' rights. Here the relevant framework is the 1985 UN Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power. In addition, in the post conflict context of Northern Ireland it is important to bear in mind the overarching UN Security Council Resolution 1820 specifically addressing the experiences of sexual harm in conflicted and post-conflict societies.

We were pleased by the draft policy's acknowledgement of the need for assessing the credibility and reliability of a victim's evidence in a careful and sensitive manner (para 3.9). We were also assured by the institutional commitment to ensuring that rape victims need practical and emotional support (para 3.15), and that the PPS has specific responsibilities to meet these needs. The Draft Policy is strong on the need to control and measure the courtroom experience in a way that is cognizant of the defendant's rights but that recognizes the specific vulnerabilities created by sexual violence and addresses the need to be sensitive to these through procedural protections.

The draft policy could, we felt, be more robust with respect to the need to ensure oversight and benchmarking criteria to ascertain if recommendations are actually being met in practice. This requires not only measuring the performance of individual prosecutors but also needs to ascertain how women victims have fared under the policy guidelines. We were also convinced that the policy could be more vigorous in terms of its commitment to training gender specialists in the prosecutorial system as an ongoing matter. We also note some concern that given the variety of standards now in play for prosecuting rape (a common law standard, the standard that applies to crimes committed on or after 28 July 2003 but before 2 February 2009, and as a result the standard that applies after 2 February 2009), inequalities or discrepancies may arise in prosecutions for older crimes. CAJ is also keenly aware that a significant and increasing body of progressive international jurisprudence concerning rape and sexual violation has emerged at the European Court of Human Rights, the Inter-American Court and Commission and through the ad hoc Tribunals for the Former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. Domestic legal systems need to play some degree of catch-up with the innovative jurisprudence and practices that have characterized these courts, so that victims of rape and sexual violence get the very best opportunity not only have the harms they have experienced acknowledged by law but also to have the law fully capture and meet the fully array of violations experienced.

Civil Liberties Diary - October

6th

The Northern Ireland Affairs Committee calls on Lord Saville to explain why his long awaited report on Bloody Sunday has been delayed again.

The family of John Brady announce they do not have confidence in the Police Ombudsman's ability to carry out an effective investigation into his death. Brady, a former Real IRA member, is believed to have taken his own life while in custody last month.

Both the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission and the Equality Commission celebrate ten years since their establishment.

Sinn Féin President, Gerry Adams, calls on Republicans to co-operate with a commission to establish the truth about the Troubles but only if it is independent and organised by an international body.

8th

A probe by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) finds that the arrangements for handling and controlling sources in paramilitary organisations in Northern Ireland are effective and comply with the legislation. The probe was launched following Nuala O'Loan's report into the murder of Raymond McCord Jnr.

14th

The Equality Commission releases its annual report. It shows that it spent more than £7 million advising more than 3,500 people.

The PSNI announce that an attack on a home in north Belfast is being treated as a racist attack. The property at Wallasey Park was damaged and some items were stolen.

An Inquest hears that Danny McIlhone was abducted and murdered by the IRA in 1981. The verdict of unlawful killing is delivered for one of the "disappeared."

19th

Evelyn Collins, Chief Executive of the Equality Commission, launches anti-racism week in Northern Ireland workplaces. The campaign is aimed at encouraging employers to develop strategies to achieve equality of opportunity and inclusivity in workplaces.

20th

The Northern Ireland Policing Board wins High Court permission to challenge an assessment that the widow of an RUC officer who committed suicide qualifies for a special award. The authority is seeking to judicially review the decision reached in the case of David Brannigan, one of the men at the centre of an alleged shoot-to-kill policy within the force.

22nd

A Dunmurry company, Sycadex Ltd, has been ordered to pay over £36,000 to a Malaysian former employee, Terence Lesslar, after being found guilty of race discrimination. His action was supported by the Equality Commission.

23rd

Raymond McCord senior speaks at a special hearing of the US Congress to investigate the involvement of special branch agents in the murder of his son in 1997.

28th

Senior coroner John Leckey says that he may compel British soldiers involved in shooting dead of a boy in Derry in 1972 to give evidence under oath. The comments come during the preliminary hearing of a fresh inquest into the death of Daniel Hegarty. It is the first time a fresh inquest has been ordered by the Historical Enquiries Team.

29th

John Moylan, an Irish man whose Chinese born wife and two children are all Irish citizens brings a legal challenge to the State's refusal to allow her widowed mother live with them in Ireland. The action is regarded as a test case relating to the rights of Irish citizens to have their non-EU dependant relatives live with them.

The Equality Commission reports that Lisburn City Council has breached its own equality policy when it excluded the SDLP from representation on a committee tasked with redrawing local government boundaries.

29th

The Police Ombudsman's Office announces that a lack of resources is hindering serious investigations. Staff are said to be struggling with the volume of cases and urgently require additional resources.

30th

The Orange Order calls for the abolition of the Parades Commission. The organisation proposes a different mediation service for resolving disputes, one involving politicians.

The Bar Council and the Law Society of Northern Ireland criticise government plans to reduce the legal aid bill. Both professions claim cuts in funding have the potential to severely restrict the ability of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged to access legal representation and justice.

Compiled by Mark Bassett from various newspapers

Just News

Just News welcomes readers' news, views and comments.

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