

Annual Report 2024



Promoting Justice / Protecting Rights

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Chairperson's foreword

Professor Anna Bryson

A Gordian knot of political, economic, social and environmental crises has unleashed a wave of new and worsening conflicts around the globe. This is fertile breeding ground for human rights and humanitarian disasters.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in Gaza. According to the UN's latest estimations, more than 43,000 people have been killed since October 2023 and more than 100,000 have been wounded. Several thousand remain under rubble. There are 1.9 million people displaced out of a population of 2.3 million. The UN has reported that sanitary conditions in existing shelters are 'disastrous' with sewage flowing from every corner in Rafah and Khan Younis. A major health epidemic is at this stage all but inevitable. Together with human rights activists around the world, we in CAJ call for an immediate ceasefire and for the humane treatment and release of hostages. In such brutal times, the vital importance of universal human rights in safeguarding justice, humanity and dignity is painfully obvious.

In spite of numerous and intersecting challenges, the staff at CAJ have worked tirelessly to uphold the rights of the vulnerable and marginalised and to thus give hope to human rights defenders around the world.

This report illustrates just how much can be achieved by a tight and dedicated group, with clear and strategic objectives, and strong leadership. In pursuit of a more equal society in which prejudice is confronted and tackled, CAJ has (together with colleagues in the Equality Coalition) worked extremely hard to hold equality oversight bodies to account and to foreground the anti-poverty agenda (including initiating a judicial review of the failure to implement the Anti-Poverty Strategy).

CAJ has closely monitored the impact of Brexit on rights and equality including the implications of 'Article 2' of the Northern Ireland Protocol (Windsor Framework). With the support of Conradh na Gaeilge and Public Interest Litigation Support (PILS) it won a significant victory for minority language rights at a local Freedom of Information Tribunal and used this local expertise to advise the Council of Europe Committee of Experts on the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. In the realm of accountability in policing, criminal justice and public administration, CAJ has worked closely with the Irish Council of Civil Liberties (ICCL) to develop an impressive and highly impactful body of work promoting human rights compliant policing. This has included supporting journalists McCaffery and Birnie in their efforts to expose PSNI surveillance of journalists, lawyers and NGOs.

For a number of years now CAJ has engaged in partnership work with North West Migrants Forum regarding racial profiling and injustice in the context of movement across the land border in the UK-Ireland 'Common Travel Area' (CTA) on the island of Ireland.

Thanks to funding from Esmée Fairbairn, this work has significantly expanded in 2024, resulting in a dedicated CAJ-NWMF Migration Justice Project, which seeks to further our joint research and campaigning work on NI-specific racial injustice issues. Following the racist violence in Belfast in August, CAJ offered leadership and support to victims, most notably in regard to accessing the Department of Justice Criminal Damage Compensation Scheme.

Finally, CAJ has continued to expose the fundamental human rights failings in the Tory-made legacy legislation and the Commission that it established. This has included lobbying hard to persuade the Irish government to take an inter-State case to Strasbourg, making representations to the UN and Council of Europe, and supporting victims and their families through the trauma of ongoing delays to their pursuit of truth and justice. CAJ has also shone a torch on the way forward, providing detailed critiques of unfolding developments and teasing out human-rights compliant solutions to ongoing problems. Most recently CAJ published (with input from academics including myself, Anurag Deb, Louise Mallinder, Colin Murray, Kieran McEvoy and Fionnuala Ní Aoláin) a comprehensive report setting out a blueprint for systemic reform of the Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery (ICRIR). CAJ's work on dealing with the legacy of the past has also involved close collaboration with international colleagues, most notably in the work of the International Expert Panel on Impunity and the Northern Ireland Conflict (set up by the Human Rights Centre at the University of Oslo at the request of CAJ and the Pat Finucane Centre). The panel's final report – a detailed and authoritative independent assessment of the history of state impunity for human rights violations - was launched in Belfast, Dublin, London and Oslo.

I would like to take this opportunity to renew, on behalf of the Executive Board, our deep gratitude to Daniel Holder and his staff for their relentless commitment to the cause of human rights in 2024. Our sincere thanks also to our members and volunteers for their ongoing commitment and dedication throughout this year. With relatively modest resources, CAJ continues to punch well above its weight and delivers a staggering volume of work and a steady stream of successes and achievements.

The challenges ahead are daunting but, throughout this report, you will find clear examples of the ways in which empathetic and legally informed human rights advocacy can deliver profoundly important change locally, nationally and internationally.



Anna Bryson

Chairperson of the CAJ Executive Board



Introduction

Daniel Holder, CAJ Director

2024 proved to be another challenging year for human rights work at home and abroad. It was however, a typically productive and impactful year for CAJ across our range of strategic priorities. We have a small but dynamic staff team, augmented during the year with three new staff members.

Early in 2024 we welcomed Shannon Doherty, to run our new partnership project with North West Migrants Forum funded by Esmée Fairburn, along with Dara Kieve who worked on a range of CAJ projects until November when she became the Policy and Legal Officer for the Equality Coalition. The latter was part of an exciting new project funded by the Baring Foundation to upscale the legal interventions work of the (CAJ-UNISON) Equality Coalition. In March we said goodbye to Robyn Scott who moved on having worked with us for many years in a dual communications and Equality Coalition role, that included delivering our new website last year.

During 2024 we were also grateful for the communications coordination work on our *Just News* newsletter by Zoha Siddiqui, who worked with us part time until she completed her studies. Into 2025, we will have a new full time Communications Officer post to maximise our output. The full staff compliment includes me as Director; Gemma McKeown, Solicitor; Úna Boyd, Immigration Solicitor; Roisín Brennan, Office and Finance Manager and Eliza Browning, Senior Policy Officer.

Under our aim of Democratic Governance we focused on seeking implementation of the rights-based provisions of the peace agreements, in particular duties to adopt an anti-poverty strategy; advocating for rights based constitutional frameworks in the context of discussions both on Stormont reform and constitutional change; implementation of commitments in relation to the Irish language; the operationalization of rights based safeguards under the NI Protocol/Windsor Framework as part of post-Brexit arrangements and specific interventions on the right to protest, including a report on the policing of environmental protestors.

In relation to Policing and Justice we continued our joint project with the Irish Council for Civil Liberties (ICCL) holding three seminars on policing and protest; surveillance and covert policing; and legacy. In relation to covert policing we supported journalists Barry McCaffery and Trevor Birnie in their case before the Investigatory Powers Tribunal and successfully campaigned, with Amnesty International, for an independent inquiry into police spying on journalists, lawyers and NGOs in NI. This led to the establishment of the McCullough Review by the PSNI Chief Constable, and our appointment to the Group of Stakeholders and Experts (GoES) for the inquiry. CAJ also achieved significant movement from the PSNI in a policy reversal over the referrals of victims and witnesses to the Home Office.

We had a particularly busy year in relation to dealing with the legacy of the Northern Ireland conflict. We were at the forefront of challenging the controversial Northern Ireland Legacy Act, introduced by the Conservative Government, which shut down the existing 'Package of Measures' dealing with NI legacy cases on 1 May 2024.

We were successful in our campaign for the Irish Government to take an inter-State case against the UK Act to the European Court of Human Rights; addressed the UN Human Rights Committee who reflected our concerns; continue to be a go-to voice in the media; secured commitments from Labour in opposition; engaged in the domestic litigation; produced two new reports and engaged extensively with the new Government to press for repeal. Our most novel initiative of the year involved the International Expert Panel on Impunity and the Northern Ireland Conflict. The Panel was set up by the Human Rights Centre at the University of Oslo at the request of CAJ and the Pat Finucane Centre and produced an authoritative account in its final report which received extensive media coverage.

Our migrant rights and anti-racism work was boosted by the formalisation of the partnership project with the Derry-based North West Migrants Forum, focusing on challenging racial profiling in the border area of the Common Travel Area; rolling back the Home Office's 'hostile environment' in devolved competence; and tackling racist intimidation and hate crime. We urgently reorientated and upscaled our work to engaged in a rapid response to the far-right disturbances and increase in orchestrated racist attacks in NI over the Summer of 2024; holding a major seminar; being a go-to voice in the media to challenge misinformation fuelling racism; securing a much improved policing response; securing a strong recommendation from the UN CERD Committee on action over paramilitary linked racist intimidation in NI and significant movement in PSNI policy over removal of racist hate material in public space, in the context of public authority inaction due to paramilitary links.



CAJ meeting with Secretary of State, Hilary Benn MP. Left to right: Prof. Colin Murray, CAJ Board; Secretary of State Hilary Benn MP; CAJ Director, Daniel Holder, CAJ Solicitor Una Boyd; and Prof. Louise Mallinder & Anurag Deb, both CAJ Board.

The Equality Coalition, a network of over 100 NI NGOs and trade unions, co-convened by CAJ and UNISON continued to go from strength to strength. We held regular, packed and active members meetings coordinating interventions; delivered a programme of seminars and trainings; gave evidence to NI Assembly Committees and held a series of meetings with Stormont Ministers securing commitments. Late in 2024 we secured Baring funding to upscale the work of this key partnership.

CAJ continued our work in the international sphere regularly engaging with the Council of Europe and UN human rights mechanisms as well as EU institutions. We were active members of the International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH) participating in their regional conference in Madrid; active members of the Strasbourg-based European Implementation Network (EIN); and joined up to the CSO Coalition on Human Rights and Counter Terrorism.

Further details on these work areas is set out in this report.

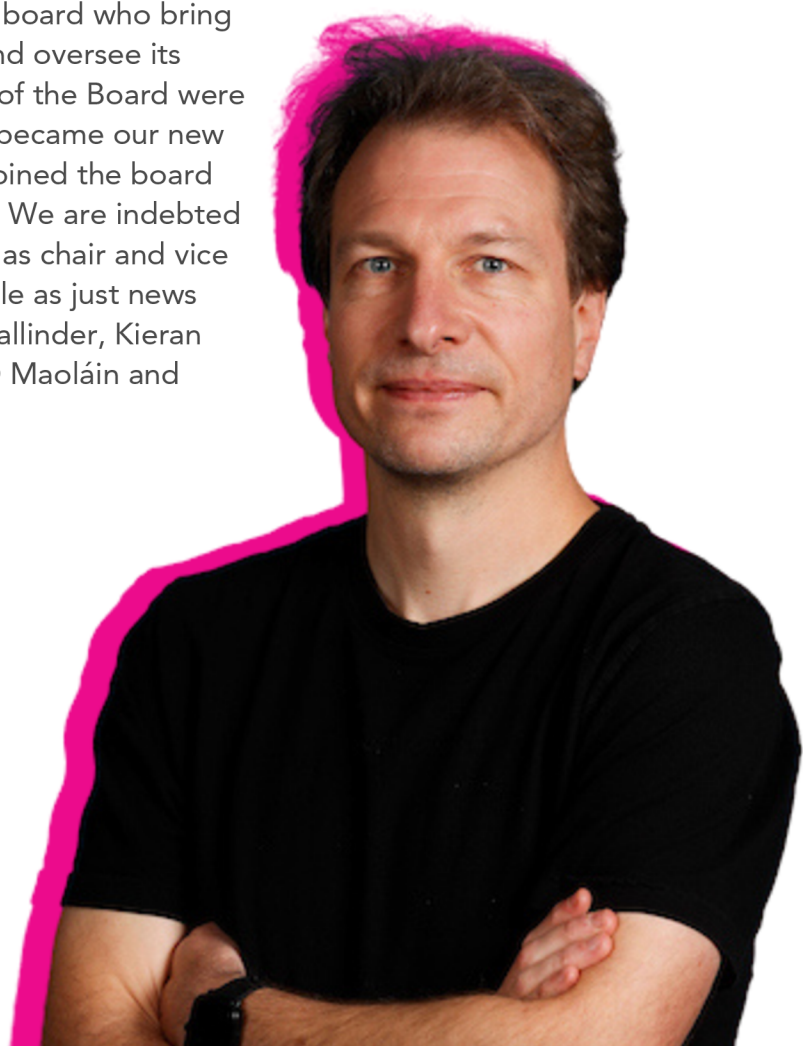
We are as ever indebted to our funders – including the core funding we receive from the Human Rights Fund, Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, AB Charitable Trust and a 'backbone' grant from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation. We receive major project funding from the Legal Education Foundation (T:LEF); Esmée Fairburn and the Baring Foundation. Programme support for the Equality Coalition comes from the UNISON Campaign Fund and small grants from the Community Foundations for Ireland and Northern Ireland. Without this support we could not continue to deliver our work.

CAJ is also indebted to its volunteer Executive board who bring expertise and dedication to the organisation and oversee its governance. This year long standing members of the Board were joined by three new members. Chris McCartin became our new Treasurer, and Anurag Deb and Colin Murray joined the board bringing particular constitutional law expertise. We are indebted to Professors Anna Bryson and Rory O'Connell as chair and vice chair respectively, Fionnuala Ní Aoláin in her role as just news editor, and all other board members: Louise Mallinder, Kieran McEvoy, Cathy Bollaert, Dáire McGill, Ciarán Ó Maoláin and Anne Smith.

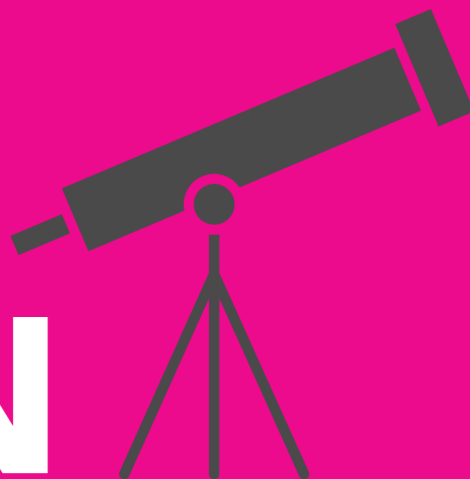
2025 awaits us.



Daniel Holder
Director



OUR VISION



CAJ's vision is a peaceful society based on human rights and equality. A peaceful, rights-based society must have a number of elements, or supporting pillars, which we aim to help build.

We work for:

- Democratic, progressive governance,
- Accountability in policing, criminal justice and public administration,
- A just resolution to the legacy of the conflict,
- A fair, humane immigration system,
- A society where prejudice and inequality is confronted
- and tackled,
- International solidarity.

It is under these headings that we organise this account of our policies and work during 2024.



Democratic, progressive governance

CAJ strives for the full implementation of the rights-based commitments of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement (GFA), and subsequent peace-process implementation agreements.

Our work in 2024 focused on pressing for the effective implementation of the rights-based safeguards over executive and legislative power found in the peace settlement and related UN and Council of Europe treaty-based obligations as well as safeguarding the incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) in Northern Ireland law, as a cornerstone commitment of the GFA.

2024 witnessed both the restoration of the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly following a further two-year period of the institutions not sitting. There was also a change of UK Government in July and an Irish General Election in November. Our work on the anti-poverty strategy, minoritised language rights and constitutional governance frameworks, along with other rights protection issues is detailed below.

Anti-Poverty Strategy

A core peace process safeguard over socio-economic rights is the statutory duty introduced under the 2006 St Andrews Agreement that the NI Executive must adopt an anti-poverty strategy based on objective need. The duty has never been compiled with.

During the 2011-2015 mandate CAJ took successful judicial review proceedings finding, that the Executive had acted unlawfully in not adopting an anti-poverty strategy. The ruling was final in 2016 but was followed by a further suspension of the NI Executive from 2017-2020.

Into the 2020 mandate there was considerable progress in developing an anti-poverty strategy with an Expert Advisory Panel producing a comprehensive blueprint, and the work of a co-design group. The Strategy was not adopted before the institutions collapsed in 2022, although officials did confirm at a Stormont event, organised by CAJ, that a draft Anti-poverty Strategy was ready to be taken forward by an incoming minister.

Following the restoration of the NI Executive in 2024, we worked with the Equality Coalition, in particular, the NI Anti-Poverty Network, Barnardo's and UNISON, to keep the anti-poverty strategy firmly on the agenda. On the 4 March 2024 we organised a packed Stormont launch of a report from the (CAJ-UNISON) Equality Coalition into progressing the Anti-Poverty Strategy for Northern Ireland, sponsored by MLAs from five parties with significant media pick up.



Equality Coalition evidence to the Communities Committee, Northern Ireland Assembly 25 April 2024. Left to right: Trása Canavan, Barnardos; Becca Bor, NI Anti-Poverty Network, John Patrick Clayton, UNISON & Daniel Holder, CAJ.

Alongside the above partner groups we then gave oral and written evidence to the Communities Committee of the NI Assembly in April, who pressed the Communities Minister to progress the strategy. This kept the Anti-Poverty Strategy high on the political agenda. In light of the slow progress however, with support from our partners in Public Interest Litigation Support (PILS) we began the process of initiating judicial review proceedings against the Executive for failing to deliver the strategy.

Rights-based Frameworks – Stormont reform and constitutional conversations

CAJ continued to inform and influence discussions and initiatives on rights-based constitutional frameworks both in relation to Stormont reform and frameworks for constitutional change in the event of the criteria in the Good Friday Agreement for a referendum on Irish unification being met.

CAJ takes no position on the constitutional status of Northern Ireland (i.e. the provisions in the GFA as to whether NI is part of the UK or part of a sovereign united Ireland.) This does not preclude CAJ involvement in discussions regarding the how constitutional frameworks in both scenarios can best protect rights. In our view rights-protections should be central to both discussions.

Our focus in relation to Northern Ireland within the UK has been on pressing for adoption of the unimplemented rights-based frameworks committed to under the GFA as safeguards over executive and legislative power. This includes the NI Bill of Rights committed to in the GFA and moving away from relying on a series of mutual vetoes vested in larger parties, including those introduced at the time of the St Andrews Agreement which have been used to block rights-based policy making.

In the spring, CAJ secured commitments from the UN Human Rights Committee at hearings in Geneva to press the UK on the NI Bill of Rights. We also met with the new Secretary of State making the case that the Bill of Rights be a principal vehicle to address Stormont dysfunctionality and contribute to the sustainability of the institutions.

In relation to constitutional frameworks for a new or united Ireland we participated as speakers in external forums with a focus on the rights of unionists, women, migrants and linguistic minorities in the context of a new constitutional arrangements.

We published two reports from ‘constitutional conversations’ seminars held with Ulster University with the support of the Gender, Justice and Security (GJS) Hub: ‘Could rights based safeguards make Stormont functional?’ and ‘How could minority and women’s rights be protected in a United Ireland.’ We also participated in a project run by the University of Liverpool with CAJ focusing on the contrast between the impact of political vetoes over Stormont governance rather than the rights-based safeguards, including the Bill of Rights, committed to under the GFA.



The reports we published from ‘constitutional conversations’ seminars held with Ulster University.

As further detailed in Minoritised language rights (see page 13), we also successfully challenged before the courts the operation of the ‘call in’ procedure in NI local councils. As a result of our case, Belfast City Council was compelled to release the reasoning behind a decision that led to the blocking of a vote in favour of bilingual (Irish-English) signage. The policy decision was subsequently reversed.



Above - CAJ and PILS staff with Conrad na Gaelige and other witnesses before the Tribunal.



Left - Left to right: Daniel Holder and Dara Kieve CAJ with Conchúr Ó Muadaigh and Ciarán Mac Giolla Bhéin having given evidence to a delegation of the Committee of Experts (COMEX) of the European Charter for Regional or Minority languages during their monitoring visit to Belfast.

Minoritised language rights – Irish and Ulster Scots

We continued partnership work with the Irish-speaking community, in particular Conradh Na Gaelige, to seek a human rights based approach to realising the language rights commitments of the peace agreements. This included numerous interventions, with considerable success, to progress a move away from 'English-only' provision to bilingual street signage policies among Councils as well as initial progress on road signage and broader provision.

CAJ gave detailed oral and written evidence to the Council of Europe Committee of Experts (COMEX) on the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML) during their monitoring visit.

CAJ concerns regarding compliance with duties relating to Irish and Ulster Scots were subsequently reflected in the COMEX monitoring report.

Following a legislative change CAJ and Conradh Na Gaelige submitted the first ever complaint to the NI Assembly Commissioner for Standards for a breach of the Ministerial Code. This concerned the reasons permitted for a Minister to boycott the meetings of the Languages Body under the North-South Ministerial Council. The complaint was upheld setting a significant precedent.

CAJ acting for Conradh Na Gaelige, with the support of the Public Interest Litigation Service (PILS) and barrister Iryna Kennedy, won a significant legal victory against Belfast City Council in the Freedom of Information Tribunal. The case dealt with an appeal against the Information Commissioner to release details of a legal determination which had validated a 'call in' by DUP councillors, alleging that bilingual signage in a Council leisure centre would 'disproportionately adversely affect' a section of the community. The Council had wished to keep the documentation confidential. The Tribunal ordered its release.

The decision was subsequently retaken, subject to a fresh 'call in' which was not upheld, meaning the bilingual signage can proceed. Strategically this case set a precedent of public interest considerations including compliance with treaty-based obligations such as the ECRML, and transparency in decision making.

A particular novelty of this case was that witnesses from the Irish speaking community working in youth, teaching and the community, were permitted by the Court to deliver part of their evidence in Irish. A 1737 law had banned the use of Irish in the courts and this was potentially the first time Irish had been used in a court in Northern Ireland.



The legal victory for CAJ acting for Conradh Na Gaelige, with the support of PILS was widely picked up within media. Pictured: Hot Press Magazine promoting the article via their Instagram account.

Brexit and the Northern Ireland Protocol/ Windsor Framework

CAJ continues to monitor the impact of Brexit on rights and equality in Northern Ireland. This includes a focus on 'Article 2' of the NI Protocol (renamed Windsor Framework) to the UK-EU Withdrawal Agreement. Article 2 provides for the ongoing legal protection in NI of certain Good Friday Agreement rights in UK law, that were previously underpinned by EU law.

CAJ also advocates for the protection of the rights of EU citizens post Brexit. This has included briefings on issues like Electronic Travel Authorisation, the Frontier Workers Scheme, and voting rights of EU citizens. We are a member of the UK wide EU Settlement Scheme Alliance, have made submissions to the Independent Monitoring Authority, and participate regularly in the EU Delegation to the UK's monitoring network.

CAJ, as the Equality Coalition, sits on the Civic Delegation on Windsor Framework Implementation. This official mechanism carries out direct engagement and regular meetings with the EU and UK co-Chairs of the Specialised Committee on the Implementation of the Windsor Framework. It provides a key platform for CAJ to advocate on issues of post Brexit rights divergence, as raised by Equality Coalition members, directly with the UK and EU.

CAJ also sits on the NI Civic Working Group on the Protocol, a broad convening of groups working on post Brexit issues in NI, and the Brexit and Human Rights Working group.

In June, CAJ brought together experts through the Equality Coalition to a seminar titled '*Article 2 of the Windsor Framework - Where are we now?*'. The over-subscribed event focused on Article 2 case law and civic society perspectives on Article 2 as a tool for protecting human rights and equality.

CAJ also engaged extensively with the NI Human Rights and Equality Commission, who have specific powers in relation to the Article 2 commitments, with Úna Boyd, CAJ Immigration Solicitor, speaking at key Commission events.

CAJ also worked collaboratively with Civil Society Europe, ICCL and the Centre for Cross Border Cooperation to raise with Brussels significant concerns about the impacts of the proposed EU 'Defence of Democracy' package could have on cross-border work in Ireland.



Full attendance at CAJ's '*Article 2 of the Windsor Framework - Where are we now?*' seminar.



Left to right: Úna Boyd, CAJ with academic speakers Anurag Deb (also CAJ Board Member) and Aoife O'Donoghue.

Panel discussion held at CAJ and Irish Council for Civil Liberties (ICCL) joint seminar on the right to protest – *The Policing of Protest: A Shifting Landscape?*.



Rights to Protest

Among other areas we focused a number of interventions in 2024 on protecting the right to protest.

In March we held a joint seminar with the Irish Council for Civil Liberties (ICCL) in Dublin on the right to protest – *The Policing of Protest: A Shifting Landscape?*. This was ICCL and CAJ’s joint ‘Policing for Peace’ project, supported by the JRCT and the Community Foundation Ireland and Community Foundation Northern Ireland programme



In September, a research report *Policing the Protectors: A Narrative Report of PSNI Policing of Environmental Protest in the Sperrins*, which documented incidents surrounding police encounters with a small group of environmental protestors assessing PSNI compliance with human rights standards. The report was launched with Friends of the Earth.

CAJ issued a detailed submission, supported by trade unions and others, to Belfast City Council critiquing proposed by-laws requiring a permit for amplified activity in Belfast City Centre with a focus on the implications for the right to protest. The Council did not proceed with the policy.

Left: Eliza Browning, CAJ Senior Policy Officer presents the ‘*Policing the Protectors - A Narrative Report of PSNI Policing of Environmental Protest in the Sperrins*’ report.

Accountability in Policing, Criminal Justice and Public Administration

Policing- joint project with the Irish Council for Civil Liberties

CAJ continued a body of work promoting human rights compliant policing through the second phase of a joint project with our sister organisation in Dublin, the Irish Council of Civil Liberties (ICCL). The project was funded by the Community Foundations of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

The first phase of the project consisted of two major comparative policing reform conferences in Belfast and Dublin respectively, from which detailed reports were produced. The second phase of the project was about drilling down into specific thematic issues of concern.

In March, we held a cross-border policing seminar on The Vindication of the Rights to Protest in Dublin. In May, we partnered in the ICCL annual policing conference which was held in Maynooth. The final event in the joint project was an NGO and academic-led roundtable on how the Irish Government should deal with legacy cases within its jurisdiction.

We also published reports from previous seminars in this joint project; namely 'Racial Profiling in Law Enforcement' and 'Police Surveillance North and South: Covert Intelligence, Facial Recognition Technology, Oversight and Human Rights'.



ICCL Director, Liam Herrick, ICCL Policing Policy Officer, Emily Williams and CAJ Director, Daniel Holder.



Professor Kieran McEvoy addresses the roundtable on Legacy in the Republic held in the Mansion House, Dublin.

Policing Practice Interventions

CAJ achieved significant progress from the PSNI in relation to their practice and policy of referring victims and witnesses of crime with perceived insecure immigration status to the Home Office. In collaboration with other NGOs and journalists, our intervention led to an Assistant Chief Constable (ACC) led review into the current PSNI data sharing and the cancellation of an automatic referral process, reducing referrals by 75%. CAJ are engaged in the process of developing the new PSNI draft service instruction on this issue and are simultaneously working with English NGOs in identifying the level of data sharing occurring in England.

With support from the Community Foundation NI CAJ is currently undertaking a research report mapping the experiences of the ongoing use of emergency type policing powers and their impact on republican and PUL (Protestant, unionist, loyalist) communities, measured against human rights standards.



Daniel Holder, CAJ and Patrick Corrigan, Amnesty NI Director meeting with Jon Boucher, PSNI Chief Constable at CAJ Office

As detailed elsewhere we also produced a report on the policing of environmental protestors and secured significant movement from the PSNI over its operational policy in relation to hate expression in public space.



Left to right: John Wadham, NI Policing Board Human Rights Legal Advisor, Mukesh Sharma, NI Policing Board Chair, Patrick Corrigan, Amnesty International, Daniel Holder, CAJ Director and Sinead Simpson, NI Policing Board CEO.

Covert Policing

CAJ worked with Amnesty International and the National Union of Journalists on the emerging scandal regarding PSNI surveillance of journalists, lawyers and NGOs. In particular, we supported journalists Barry McCaffery and Trevor Birnie in their case before the Investigatory Powers Tribunal (IPT) in London.

Jointly with Amnesty International, we campaigned for the establishment of a broader inquiry into PSNI practices. This led to the PSNI Chief Constable establishing an inquiry led by an independent Counsel, Angus McCullough KC. Daniel Holder as CAJ Director was then appointed to the Group of Experts and Stakeholders (GoES) to the ongoing inquiry.



Left to right: Una Murphy, Daniel Holder, CAJ, Patrick Corrigan, Amnesty International, Barry McCaffery and Brian Pelan.



Journalists Trevor Birnie and Barry McCaffery address the media outside the Investigatory Powers Tribunal.



Daniel Holder, CAJ addresses press conference calling for an inquiry into police surveillance of journalists with the NUJ and Amnesty.

A just resolution to the legacy of conflict

2024 saw the context of the implementation of the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act 2023 introduced unilaterally by the previous Conservative UK Government who had reneged on the peace process 2014 Stormont House Agreement and 2015 treaty.

The Legacy Act had the functions of 1) closing down the existing 'Package of Measures' of NI legacy mechanisms at a time they were most delivering for victims and families; 2) introducing a broad amnesty in the form of a 'conditional immunities' scheme; 3) setting up a new limited legacy commission (the 'ICRIR') to conduct limited reviews in legacy cases 4) provisions on memorialisation.

CAJ, working in tandem with our academic board members, has become a go to voice in the media and producer of influential legal and policy critiques and advice on the Legacy Act. Among other briefings we launched two new reports during the year. The first a compendium of CAJ legacy submissions, the second, in November, a report on 'root and branch' reform from the ICRIR.

CAJ featured in the BBC Spotlight documentary Killer Secrets, in May 2024, through which Ministers were also pressed regarding our concerns over a 'national security veto' power allowing the Ministerial redaction of reports by the new legacy commission.

This raised the prominence of the 'national security veto' which was subsequently found to be unlawful by the Court of Appeal.

The new Labour Government was elected in July with a manifesto commitment to repeal and replace the Legacy Act. We met with the now Secretary of State Hillary Benn on several occasions and continue to engage with both the UK and Irish Governments, political parties and victims and human rights NGOs on moving forward on the manifesto commitments. We have also met with the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee and given oral evidence to the central committee at the NI Assembly (the Executive Office Committee).

Inter-State Case, UN engagement and domestic litigation

CAJ had initiated a broad campaign to urge the Irish Government to challenge the UK Legacy Act in an Inter-State case to the European Court of Human Rights. This was successful with the case – Ireland v the UK (no 3) being formally lodged in January. CAJ led an application to intervene in the Inter-State case, being joined by The Pat Finucane Centre, ICCL, FIDH and Human Rights First. The Irish Government retains the case awaiting satisfactory movement on repeal of the Legacy Act and reform of the ICRIR.

CAJ briefed and addressed the UN Human Rights Committee in Geneva in April as part of their assessment of UK compliance with the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICRIR). The Committee reflected our concerns regarding the Legacy Act and ICRIR making strong and influential recommendations. We also hosted an NGO, NHRI meeting with the European Implementation Network (EIN) Director in March.

CAJ worked with law firms to assist in the domestic litigation at the High Court and NI Court of Appeal which, in February and September respectively, found significant elements of the Legacy Act to be unlawful.

CAJ worked with law firms to assist in the domestic litigation at the High Court and NI Court of Appeal which, in February and September respectively, found significant elements of the Legacy Act to be unlawful.

CAJ represented the next of kin of Paul 'Topper' Thompson in the inquest into his death. The Inquest was closed down by the Legacy Act before it could complete with the former Secretary of State judicially reviewing the coroner to seek to prevent publication of a 'gist' of intelligence information. The High Court twice and subsequently the Court of Appeal concurred with our legal arguments and dismissed the judicial review against the coroner. This resulted in a historic shift in position by the PSNI and landmark rulings over the application Government's 'Neither Confirm nor Deny' (NCND) doctrine over disclosure.



Alyson Kilpatrick, Chief Commissioner Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission address at launch of 'Root and Branch Reform of the ICRIR' CAJ report.



NGO panel - left to right: Declan Owens, Rights and Security International; Grainne Taggart, Amnesty; Mark Thompson, Relatives for Justice and Paul O'Connor, Pádraig Finucane Centre.



Still from Daniel Holder, CAJ Director, interview for BBC Spotlight documentary Killer Secrets



Addressing the UN Human Rights Committee in Geneva.

International Expert Panel on State Impunity and the NI Conflict

In late April 2024 '*Bitter Legacy*', the report of the International Expert Panel into State Impunity and the Northern Ireland Conflict was published. Launches in Belfast, Dublin and London coincided with the Legacy Act coming into force and garnering significant media coverage. Among other dissemination activities, a launch in Oslo, Norway also took place in October.

The International Panel had been convened by the Norwegian Center for Human Rights at the University of Oslo at the request of CAJ and the Pat Finucane Centre (PFC) who acted as the secretariat. The Panel of international experts, consisting of academics, lawyers, human rights activists and former police officers, was tasked with providing an authoritative independent assessment of the extent to which there has been state impunity for human rights violations during the Northern Ireland conflict.

The report contains a foreword from former UN Special Rapporteur, Juan Méndez, and an afterword from former South African Truth and Reconciliation member Yasmin Sooka, who had been involved in the initiation of the Panel.

The Panel were supported by teams of postgraduate and other students including two PhD students undertaking placements at CAJ, examining a vast array of archival records and evidence from legal proceedings and the Package of Measures. We organised seven site visits to Northern Ireland for the Panel to gather evidence from dozens of families and practitioners. The Panel looked in detail at the question of state impunity in the thematic areas of direct state killings, torture and collusion.



Dublin launch of the Panel Report.



London launch of the Panel Report.

The Panel was established in light of the introduction of the Legacy Act closing down independent investigations under the Package of Measures, in the context of official claims that such legacy investigations were 'imbalanced' or had constituted a 'witch-hunt' against the security forces.

By contrast, the International Expert Panel concluded in its report that the UK had in reality 'operated a widespread, systematic, and systemic practice of impunity, protecting security forces from sanction' and 'not only engaged in collusion but also blocked proper police investigations into conflict-related killings to protect implicated security force members and agents.'



A copy of the Panel Report is presented to Blinne Ní Ghrálaigh by CAJ and PFC following her delivery of the the Bloody Sunday Annual Lecture.



Members of the International Expert Panel - Left to right: Kjell Erik Eriksen; Dr Brian Dooley; María José Gueembe; Prof Ron Dudai; plus panel Convener, Gisle Kvanvig; out of shot Dr Aoife Duffy.

Photo: Mal McCann

A fair and humane immigration system

CAJ continues to work to tackle structural racism and to protect the right of migrants in our community. Since our immigration focused work began in 2019, there have been rapid, often regressive changes to immigration law and policy, both in the UK and across the EU.

CAJ advocates for a fair and human rights compliant immigration regime, with a continued focus on the unique and complex issues which impact the rights of migrants on the island of Ireland, particularly in border regions. The past year has also seen a surge in anti-migrant, racist rhetoric and violence. CAJ has undertaken strategic interventions to tackle misinformation and some of the root causes of racism in our society and has directly supported victims of racist violence and hate crimes.

CAJ significantly upscaled existing work in response to the far-right disturbances in Belfast and upsurge in racist intimidation and attacks in August 2024.

We are particularly pleased to have received funding from Esmée Fairbairn Foundation to support our joint work with North West Migrants Forum (NWMF). This allowed us to recruit a joint NWMF/ CAJ Project Research and Campaigns Worker, Shannon Doherty, to lead our dedicated joint project building on our previous Common Travel Area campaign.

During 2024 Lillian Seenoi-Barr CEO of NWMF was elected as Mayor of Derry City and Strabane, we were delighted for Lillian to deliver our annual CAJ Lecture in December under the title of: 'From Seeking Refuge to Mayor: Resilience, Social Justice, and Reimagining an Inclusive Ireland'



CAJ staff at Derry City and Strabane District Council Mayoral Inauguration - Left to right: Úna Boyd, CAJ Immigration Solicitor, Daniel Holder, CAJ Director, Lillian Seenoi-Barr, North West Migrant Forum CEO & Derry City and Strabane Mayor and Eliza Browning, Senior Policy Officer CAJ.

Joint Campaign with North West Migrants Forum (NWMF)

CAJ and NWMF have for several years engaged in partnership working on a joint campaign regarding racial profiling and injustice in the context of movement across the land border in the UK-Ireland 'Common Travel Area' (CTA) on the island of Ireland.

Thanks to funding from Esmée Fairbairn, we have built on this work and developed a dedicated CAJ-NWMF Migration Justice Project, which seeks to further our joint research and campaigning work on NI-specific racial injustice issues. The project is led by Shannon Doherty, and focuses on research, campaigning and strategic policy intervention. Key areas of work have included producing an accessible version of CAJ's hostile environment report, research into the experience of racist hate crimes and policing, seeking to end selective passport controls within the CTA, and campaigning to reform the hard border faced by visa nationals. As part of the joint project, we have briefed politicians and policy makers, including the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

As part of this role, CAJ now has representation on a number of forums and sub-groups through the partnership with the NWMF. In this our Research and Campaigns Worker has taken over the Secretariat Support position of the All Party Group on Ethnic Minorities; sits on the NI Executives' Racial Equality Subgroup (RES) and its working groups on Ethnic Equality Monitoring, Voluntary and Community Sector (Refugee and Asylum), and Racist Bullying in Schools.

Throughout the joint project, CAJ and NWMF have delivered a number of training sessions including on 'UK Student Visas and Worker's Rights: Rights and Responsibilities' and our Research and Project Worker has delivered a number of Racial Literacy and Cultural Competency training sessions for statutory bodies and trade unions.

The joint project was responsible for bringing Little Amal to Derry as part of her big walk around Ireland. Little Amal is the 12 foot puppet of a 10 year old Syrian refugee child at the heart of The Walk. She has become a global symbol of human rights, especially those of refugees.



Úna Boyd and Shannon Doherty, CAJ, attending the UN International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination hearings in Geneva.

CAJ and NWMF made joint submissions to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination examination of the UK and attended the examination of the UK in Geneva. Úna and Shannon made a formal intervention and participated in civic society engagement sessions with committee members. Our interventions focused on the rollback of the human rights framework and impacts on the Good Friday Agreement, the link between paramilitaries, racist hate crimes and housing intimidation, and racial profiling within the Common Travel Area. These issues were raised by committee members during the examination of the UK and were reflected in the concluding observations. The concluding observations made particularly strong recommendations regarding the need to tackle paramilitary involvement in racist hate crimes and intimidation in NI.

CAJ met with the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance during their in country visit to the UK, and provided evidence to inform their examination of the UK, which was reflected in the final report, recommendations on racist crime, removal of hate expression and racial profiling.

This year, unsubstantiated statements by politicians in Dublin and London regarding the mass movement of asylum seekers over the border threatened to undermine the progressive work of the joint project by calling for increased enforcement and control on the land border. CAJ was instrumental in shifting the political and media narrative on this issue, across the island of Ireland. In particular, we combatted misinformation by highlighting previous authoritative research by the Economic and Social Research Institute which demonstrated the political statements were unreliable and unsubstantiated. We provided legal expertise in media interviews and briefed politicians and organisations on the issue. CAJ collaborated with Irish organisations on a joint statement, published as a Letter of the Day in the Irish Times. This work led to significant public revision of the claims, as well as media and fact check reporting exposing the claim as unsubstantiated.

Illegal Migration Act

The UK Illegal Migration Act (IMA) 2023 and linked Rwanda policy were among the worst excesses of the previous Conservative Government. The IMA is yet to be repealed by the Labour government. CAJ's work on the IMA has focused on the unique impact of this legislation on the land border. We consistently raised concerns regarding the risks of racial profiling and arbitrary detention of persons moving across the land border, and the manner in which the IMA rolled back key protections under the Human Rights Act, and hence is incompatible with the Good Friday Agreement.

CAJ provided an expert affidavit in the NI Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) landmark challenge to the Illegal Migration Act. This was the first substantial challenge to the IMA in the UK and it prevailed.

The Courts found the IMA incompatible with both the ECHR and Good Friday Agreement rights underpinned by Article 2 of the Windsor Framework, the latter disapplied the IMA in Northern Ireland. Our political briefings in Westminster, NI and in the media on the IMA continued to combat misinformation about the judgement, which focused on anti-migrant and anti-EU rhetoric.

Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Act

Under the Safety of Rwanda Act asylum seekers who came to the UK would not be permitted to claim asylum and would instead be sent to Rwanda for their asylum claim to be processed. CAJ participated in the joint response to the Bill through the Cross Sector Migration Coalition. We carried out a range of interventions in NI and Westminster on the Rwanda bill, focusing on NI specific issues such as the legislation's incompatibility with the GFA. This included written evidence in a submission to the Westminster Joint Committee on Human Rights, whose report reflected our concerns regarding GFA incompatibility. The Safety of Rwanda Act was repealed by the new Labour government, but the issue of offshore asylum processing remains a concern.



Garda Immigration officers at Dublin Connolly Station receiving the Belfast train.

Rolling back the Home Office Hostile Environment

The Hostile Environment is a suite of policies designed by the UK Home Office to make life unbearable for any person living in the UK without secure immigration status. These policies impact all migrants and people perceived to be migrants and have led to widespread racial profiling and refusals of services. Many hostile environment policies encroach on areas of devolved competency in Northern Ireland, such as healthcare, housing and social welfare. In 2022 CAJ published a legal research report, 'Can Stormont Rollback the Home Office Hostile Environment' which mapped how the NI Assembly could legislate to roll back elements of the hostile environment, in areas of devolved competence. Building on this report, CAJ worked with Counsel and a legislative draftsman to develop a model hostile environment repeal bill. This model bill is designed to be a functional blueprint showing how the NI Assembly can act on the findings of our 2022 report. Following Stormont's return, CAJ has secured commitments from individual ministers regarding our key asks. We have also been producing, with NWMF, an accessible version of our 2022 report.

Networks and collaboration

As part of our immigration work CAJ participates in a number of key networks including the Refugee and Asylum forum, the Migrant Forum, the Hate Crime Stakeholder Forum, Stronger Together Network, the Racial Equality Subgroup (RES), the Ethnic Equality Monitoring Working Group, Voluntary and Community Sector (Refugee and Asylum) Working Group, Racist Bullying in Schools WG, EUSS Alliance, EU Delegation Monitoring Network, Immigration Lawyers Practitioners Association, Cross Sector Migration Coalition, Save our Human Rights Act, Ad Hoc Committee on North, South, East, West Cooperation and the Law Society NI Immigration Practitioners Group.

Frontier Workers

The implementation of the Frontier Worker scheme in NI remains a key concern in the post-Brexit rights landscape. CAJ has consistently raised concerns about the impact of the scheme on the rights of cross border workers and their families. Our work on this scheme has focused on trying to draw out data, which would demonstrate the use of the scheme in NI. CAJ made submissions on this issue at the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement Civil Society Forum, and to the UK-EU Specialised Committee on the Implementation of the Windsor Framework.

Racist Hate Crimes and Housing Intimidation

CAJ continued to critique the state-response to paramilitary housing intimidation in NI, which tends to focus on verifying threats and moving victims with little criminal justice outcomes for perpetrators. CAJ supported proceedings relating to gaps in the NI intimidation housing points scheme brought by the NI Human Rights Commission, with CAJ providing an expert affidavit.

CAJ acted as solicitor representing victims of racist hate crimes in their applications for the official Criminal Damage Compensation scheme. This work has exposed issues and irregularities within the scheme, which hinders victim recovery and further compounds the trauma of the crime. CAJ is advocating for reform of the scheme and continues to represent victims of the racist riots in Belfast in accessing the scheme.

CAJ and NWMF are undertaking research to produce a report which maps key areas of concern in relation to racist hate crime, and will encompass issues such as police recording of hate crime, the state response to housing intimidation (and transparent data on the source of housing intimidation threats), and threat verification. CAJ also met with Justice Minister Naomi Long to discuss taking forward revised hate crimes legislation in the current assembly mandate and held a briefing on the topic with Equality Coalition members to reach an agreed approach.

Tackling Prejudice

The August Far-Right Disorder

CAJ upscaled and re-orientated our existing anti-racist work in response to the August 2024 disorder in Belfast and the escalation in paramilitary-linked racist attacks. We were part of monitoring and intervention groups with migrant and Muslim communities and CAJ were one of the key voices in the media, particularly on the BBC TV and radio to combat misinformation and achieve a better state response to racist intimidation. CAJ engaged at Chief Constable and ACC level with the PSNI regarding the policing response which significantly improved.

In relation to the UK Government response CAJ met alongside victims with the Secretary of State Hilary Benn and with other NGOs with Minister of State Fleur Anderson. At Stormont we organised a specific dedicated session of the All Party Group on ethnic minorities and supported NWMF reps to give evidence to the Executive Office Committee of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

CAJ also gave evidence to the UN CERD committee in August on the disorder and assisted victims with compensation claims. Furthermore, CAJ organised a major panel discussion on combatting the far right at the August Belfast Féile, attended by hundreds of persons and media.

CAJ through the Equality Coalition and emergency support from funders took forward speedily a new project with Rabble Collective to map far-right organising online in the Northern Ireland context. The first phase of the project mapped far right organising and amplification in relation to the Belfast riots, and also an earlier period of racist intimidation, using particularly posters. This has been presented to Equality Coalition members, broader black and minority ethnic leaders and public authorities. The project has continued to map and drill deeper into online far right activity in Northern Ireland.



Daniel Holder, CAJ with Lillian Seenoi-Barr, Mayor of Derry City with Fleur Anderson, NIO Minister of State.



Combatting the Far-Right Féile Panel - Left to right: Daniel Holder, CAJ, Dr Naomi Green, activist and researcher working with NWMF, Belfast Multi-Cultural Association and others; Shane O'Curry, Irish Network Against Racism (INAR); Liz Fekete, Institute of Race Relations (IRR).

State response to Hate Expression in Public Space

CAJ has developed a body of work on the response to hate expression in public spaces in Northern Ireland, much of which is linked to paramilitary activity and met with a limited state response, despite the ongoing harm it causes. In the Northern Ireland context, this includes threatening graffiti, the use of loyalist or union flags as tools of sectarian or racist intimidation of housing and, more recently, the display of racist posters with similar intent. These items are often placed on lampposts and other 'street furniture' owned by the NI Department of Infrastructure.

CAJ previously produced a research report, *'Dealing with hate expression in public space in Northern Ireland.'* The concerns outlined within this report were also reflected in the recommendation of the independent judge-led official review of Northern Ireland Hate Crimes Legislation (Marrinan Review), which recommended a statutory duty on public authorities to take reasonable steps to remove hate expression on their own property or broader public space.

With legislative progress stalled due to institutional suspension and the backlog this created, CAJ prioritised policy change within the PSNI and the Department of Infrastructure. Supported by PILS, we issued legal letters challenging their failure to implement effective removal policies, leading to meetings with the Chief Constable and Infrastructure Minister.

The PSNI subsequently hosted a senior decision-makers workshop with CAJ, led by an Assistant Chief Constable, to examine the issues in detail. This process facilitated a formal review of PSNI policy, resulting in proposed revisions to its Operational Guidance and Service Instructions. The initiation of litigation also exposed the previously unwritten policy of the Department of Infrastructure. While this policy was later adjusted in response to a specific incident involving racist posters, we remain concerned that the Department's overall approach, whereby items are generally not removed unless there is complete 'community consensus,' regardless of the harm caused, is not compliant with the ECHR. We continue to seek a remedy for this.



Threatening signage in the Rathcoole area which was ultimately removed.

Increased Equality

The Equality Coalition

The Equality Coalition, co-convened by UNISON and CAJ, has long been a critical partnership vehicle to achieve CAJ strategic goals. The Coalition has over 100 member organisations, with membership continuing to grow further year-on-year.

A number of these members are themselves umbrella groups and the largest and most diverse is the trade union movement. There has been, and remains, no other collective voice on equality in NI and no other overarching consistent 'critical friend' of the equality oversight bodies, public authorities, and local government. A key part of the Coalition's work centres on encouraging application of the Section 75 equality duties and engaging regularly with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI). The work of the Coalition is supported by the UNISON Campaign Fund.

The past twelve months have been marked by significant achievements, from high-level political engagement to the continued provision of critical capacity-building resources for our members. As we look forward, the Equality Coalition remains committed to advancing equality and rights protections in Northern Ireland, with a focus on ensuring that the needs of marginalised communities are heard and addressed.

The Coalition continues to hold regular meetings with our members, where we discuss how best to advance the equality agenda in NI, in addition to offering our members capacity building training sessions and organising events about key issues.

Towards the end of 2024 CAJ secured legal hub funding from the Baring Foundation in an exciting project to upscale the legal interventions work of the Equality Coalition. A full time Equality Coalition post is now in place to coordinate this work into 2025.

Training and Capacity Building

The Equality Coalition organised a number of sessions for members including a Digital Safety Training Workshop for members with hands-on training in cybersecurity; a training seminar jointly with PILS on Defamation and Online Abuse Training, providing members with legal and practical strategies for dealing with defamatory remarks and protecting their reputations online; and a Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation seminar, also joint with PILS, in September with speakers such as Jessica Ní Mhainín (Index on Censorship) and journalists from The Detail and BBC NI.



Patricia McKeown Regional Secretary UNISON and Equality Coalition Co-Convenor, addresses a Stormont launch of a report into the Anti-Poverty Strategy.



Over the past year, the Equality Coalition has actively organised events and campaigns on a range of issues:

- **Getting on with it: Insights from Colombia, Lebanon, and Northern Ireland on Living with Conflict** - A seminar in partnership with a University of Bristol-led project which CAJ partnered on, exploring coping mechanisms in post-conflict societies, with a focus on gender, economic exclusion, and (dis)ability. We also facilitated grassroots meetings as part of the project.
- **Radium Girls** - In collaboration with Queen's University and the Lyric Theatre, the Coalition successfully hosted a sold-out pre-performance event in April 2024 which centred around the play 'Radium Girls', exploring the intersection of social justice and the arts. This event demonstrated the potential of creative mediums to inspire activism and foster discussions on justice and advocacy.
- **Article 2 of the Windsor Framework: Where Are We Now?** - This June 2024 event gathered experts to discuss recent Article 2 case law and its role in protecting human rights and equality from a civic society perspective.



CAJ staff Roisin Brennan, Shannon Doherty and Zoha Siddiqui at the *Radium Girls* performance.



Dara Keeve CAJ Equality Coalition Legal and Policy Officer (right) with Tánaiste Micheál Martin (middle).

Advocacy

The Coalition compiled has maintained a strong focus on protecting and enhancing human rights. We developed a list of Programme for Government 'policy asks' divided by Stormont departments and held a series of engagements with Stormont Ministers to secure commitments. We raised concerns in our formal response to the draft Programme for Government regarding the removal of rights based commitments from the draft contained in the 2020 New Decade New Approach deal.

The Equality Coalition Co-Convenors gave oral and written evidence to the Committee on the Executive Office as part of their [Inquiry into Gaps in Equality Legislation](#). Our [evidence](#) focused on the absence of single equality legislation, the enforcement of the Section 75 and the lack of definition and improper application of 'Good Relations'.

EU and UK Engagements

The Coalition has also played an active role in engaging with key European and UK stakeholders. In partnership with the NI Civic Society Working Group, the Coalition participated in a delegation to Brussels, meeting with officials from the UK Mission to the EU and Irish MEPs. Issues such as the Article 2 of the Windsor Framework, the Common Travel Area, and Frontier Workers were raised, positioning the Coalition as an essential voice in shaping post-Brexit rights protections.



Equality Coalition co-convenors meeting with Minister for Economy Conor Murphy MLA, focusing on employment rights issues.

Additionally, participation in the Windsor Framework Implementation Delegation has provided further high-level engagement with both EU and UK representatives. The Coalition has been confirmed as a member of the delegation, ensuring ongoing advocacy for rights and equality in NI.

Equality Interventions

CAJ through the Coalition have continued to press for the effective application of the 'Section 75' statutory equality duty in Northern Ireland, brought in further to the GFA.

We secured commitments from the Finance Minister to modify its Equality Scheme following a CAJ complaint to the NI Public Services Ombudsman over a roll-back on committed changes during a period when there was no minister in place. We have also challenged several failures to comply with section 75 over areas as diverse as the draft budget and GP services closures.

The Coalition also commissioned a piece of research into the use of local government 'call-ins' and equality screenings, to examine whether there is a disparate approach to highly influential policies with a 'light touch' approach to Section 75 compliance, contrasted with an overreach and misuse of Section 75 where rights-based policies are considered to lead to 'community tensions'.



CAJ attended the Women's Policy Group meeting with UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women and Girls, Reem Alsalem, during a visit to Belfast.

Environmental Rights

As a growth area of our work, we are expanding our involvement in the intersection of environmental rights and human rights.

As referenced in the policing section of this report in September, we held an event to launch our independent report evaluating the policing response to environmental protestors, “Policing the Protectors: A Narrative Report of PSNI Policing of Environmental Protest in the Sperrins”, with a video keynote address from Michel Forst, the UN Special Rapporteur on Environmental Defenders under the Aarhus Convention. We have also been developing a “Know Your Rights Guide to Protest” in collaboration with Friends of the Earth, PILS, and the Environmental Justice Network Ireland. This guide will assist protestors with understanding their rights when planning a protest, during a protest, and after a protest, and contains useful contacts and a section on defamation.

The Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) is preparing to hold an inquiry into the Dalradian goldmining planning application (the largest planning application in the history of NI). We have been assisting environmental campaigners to have their voices heard during the upcoming PAC inquiry by helping them submit Section 75 equality duty complaints. We also submitted a joint letter of concern regarding the PAC inquiry procedures with PILS.

The Mobuoy dump near Derry-Londonderry is one of the largest illegal toxic waste dumps in Europe, and one of the worst environmental crimes in UK history. It is also located five meters away from the River Faughan, which supplies over 60% of the city’s drinking water. In accordance with the Rights of Nature movement, we assisted environmental campaigners in the novel approach drafting a victim-impact statement on behalf of the River Faughan with the goal of it be considered sentencing hearing of the perpetrators of the Mobuoy dump. CAJ sits on the Mobuoy remediation stakeholder group.



Eliza Browning, CAJ Senior Policy Officer, addresses a PILS Climate Justice Conference alongside Friends of the Earth.



Left to right: Daniel Holder, CAJ Director and Una Boyd, CAJ Immigration Solicitor with Loulietta Bisiouli, EIN Director and Maria McCloskey, PILS CEO.



CAJ joined members of UNISON global solidarity activists to meet with the Colombian Consul to London and former Minister Irene Vélez Torres discussing peace process experiences.



Gemma McKeown, CAJ Solicitor, along with other delegates at the EIN Conference in the Hague.

International Solidarity

In addition to our regular engagement with the UN and Council of Europe human rights mechanisms, and with the EU in Northern Ireland's particular the post-Brexit context, we also remained active in international NGO networks.

CAJ remained a full and active member of the International Federation on Human Rights (FIDH). This included our participation in the regional FIDH meeting in Madrid in April, presenting on the Legacy Act and shaping the FIDH 'Madrid Manifesto' for European Parliamentary elections.

We also remained active members of the Strasbourg-based European Implementation Network (EIN) which assists member groups in seeking the implementation of ruling of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR). We participated in the EIN biannual meeting in the Hague in June which focused on the role of an independent judiciary.

During 2024 CAJ also became members of the CSO Coalition on Human Rights and Counter Terrorism.



CAJ and fellow FIDH members (briefly...) take over the Spanish Prime Ministers press podium during an engagement at the Moncloa on the fringes of the Madrid FIDH regional conference.

Communications

It remains important that CAJ's work is not only impeccably accurate and authoritative, but that it is also widely disseminated. This year, we maintained our focus on enhancing our engagement through a wide range of events.

These included the launch of our significant report, 'Bitter Legacy: State Impunity in the Northern Ireland Conflict', which we presented in Belfast, Dublin, and London. Additionally, we hosted the Anti-Poverty Strategy Seminar Report launch and organised several Féile an Phobail events addressing Legacy issues and Far Right Racist Violence. We also hosted a range of Equality Coalition seminars.

Partnerships are central to our approach, and most of these events were organised in collaboration with grassroots organisations, reflecting our commitment to working closely with community groups. Where possible, these events were hybrid – allowing people to join online as well as in-person to maximise participation and accessibility. Hundreds of people have attended events organised or co-organised by us during 2024.

Our newly modernised website continues to perform strongly, with over 33,000 views from more than 11,000 visitors in the past year. Some of our most popular content includes key publications such as 'Seminar Report - Progressing an Anti-Poverty Strategy for Northern Ireland', and 'Bitter Legacy: State Impunity in the Northern Ireland Conflict'. While most of our users are based in the UK, we also attract significant traffic from Ireland, Germany, the US, India, France, and Canada. The majority of our website's traffic is organic, with a substantial portion driven by posts shared on Twitter/X.

We published five issues of our newsletter Just News this year, including a special edition which focused on recent political and legal developments in respect to the legacy of conflict in Northern Ireland. You can read all of our 2024 issues here: www.caj.org.uk/publication_type/our-newsletter

We also sent out our ezine, Just Updates, on a regular basis. We used this to update our members of our activities and to advertise events. If you'd like to receive this direct to your inbox, you can sign up here: bit.ly/JustUpdatesSignUp

CAJ received widespread and regular media coverage throughout 2024, particularly in relation to our work on immigration, the Anti-Poverty Strategy, and the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act 2023. This media coverage includes TV interviews, radio interviews, newspaper articles and podcasts. We also received significant coverage regarding the far right racist violence and on our report on the Policing Response to Environmental Protest.

Our online engagement continues to be strong, and we have increased our overall follower count on both of our 'Twitter' accounts, hitting a milestone of 5,000 followers on the CAJ Twitter account. Into 2025 we are also reviewing our use of social media platforms with a view to diversification and ethical use.

Into 2025 we aim to significantly grow our dissemination and impact following our recent recruitment of a full time Communications Officer, Hannah Loughran.

We continue to make every effort to be fully compliant with GDPR. If you would like to find out more about how we keep your data secure, please refer to our Privacy Policy, which is available from our website. You can also request a copy of this policy by emailing info@caj.org.uk



Finance and Funding

CAJ is supported by the Human Rights Fund – a dedicated fund managed by the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland, designed to support CAJ and the three other organisations in the Human Rights Partnership (the Human Rights Consortium, Participation and the Practice of Rights, and Public Interest Litigation Support).

CAJ is also very grateful for the support of:

AB Charitable Trust
The Baring Foundation
Community Foundation for Northern Ireland
Community Foundation for Ireland
Esmée Fairbairn Foundation
Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust
Legal Education Foundation
Paul Hamlyn Foundation
UNISON Campaign Fund

CAJ has also raised funds through Local Giving and would like to thank everyone who has made a donation. You can find our Local Giving page here:

www.localgiving.org/charity/caj/.

CAJ's most recent audited annual accounts are available on the Companies House website at the following link:

<https://find-and-update.company-information.service.gov.uk/company/NI032591/filing-history>



Staffing

Staff

Daniel Holder, Director
Gemma McKeown, Solicitor
Úna Boyd, Immigration Solicitor
Roisín Brennan, Office and Finance Manager
Eliza Browning, Senior Policy Officer
Robyn Scott, Communications & Equality Coalition Coordinator (until March 2024)

Shannon Doherty, Joint NW Migrants Forum/CAJ Project Research and Campaigns Worker
Dara Keeve, Policy Officer
Zoha Siddiqui, Just News (till September 2024)

Executive

Professor Anna Bryson, Chairperson
Professor Rory O'Connell, Vice-Chair
Professor Fionnuala Ni Aolain, Editor of Just News
Chris McCartin, Treasurer (Since January 2024)
Professor Louise Mallinder
Cathy Bollaert

Anurag Deb
Professor Kieran McEvoy
Dáire McGill
Ciarán Ó Maoláin
Dr Anne Smith
Professor Colin Murray (since May 2024)



'Angel of Peace' sculpture,
carved for CAJ.



CAJ

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Promoting Justice / Protecting Rights

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