

*Special edition on a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland*

## Editorial

This edition of Just News has been specially dedicated to the discussion of a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. Regular readers of Just News will be aware that the debate around a Bill of Rights has been progressing for some time, and we have sought in Just News to give a series of different perspectives on the impact a Bill of Rights could have, for example, for those with a learning disability, carers, young people and so on.

In this edition, we turn our attention to the consultation document produced at the beginning of September by the NI Human Rights Commission. The Commission is currently seeking views on the contents of this document and the deadline for receipt of these views is 1 December 2001. Admittedly, this is not an easy timescale within which to digest and respond to a 150+ page document which gives quite detailed recommendations and explanations on what a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland might contain.

However, it is more important than ever to respond and show the cross-community public support that exists for a Bill of Rights. Many will have seen or heard the recent Assembly debate on the Bill of Rights and some of the concerns that were expressed, arguably about human rights as a whole, but in particular about the inclusion of economic and social rights in a Bill of Rights. It is now more important than ever to develop ownership and respond to this debate.

For its part, CAJ has produced a four-page summary of the Commission's recommendations, as well as a short preliminary critique which highlights some of our initial concerns with the document. These concerns relate amongst others to the identity and community chapter, to the language provisions and to the proposals regarding socio-economic rights (***copies of the summary and critique are available from CAJ offices free of charge***). This newsletter does not address all of CAJ's concerns but selects some key topics for consideration.

Along with the Ad Hoc Human Rights Consortium, CAJ has been trying to ensure that as many people as possible are informed about this debate and encouraged to participate. Among other things, the Consortium recently produced a supplement in the Belfast Telegraph, which will have been delivered to approximately 140,000 people. **Copies are available from the office.**

We are clearly entering a key phase – the Commission needs to be assisted in its attempts to draw up a comprehensive Bill of Rights by receiving as many submissions as possible. With this kind of ownership and public support informing their final advice to the Secretary of State, the Commission will be equipped to argue effectively that Northern Ireland needs a Bill of Rights that can *really* make a difference.

*Fionnuala ni Aolain*

## Inclusive Rights? Social Economic and Cultural Rights in "Making a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland."

The section of the Human Rights Commission's consultation paper concerned with social and economic rights begins by indicating that the Commission's initial opinion survey showed an exceptionally high level of support for the inclusion of socio-economic rights in any Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. Well over 80% - even more than voted for the Good Friday Agreement itself - were in favour of including rights relating to health, housing and employment.

The document also cites the Good Friday Agreement on the need to deal with economic and social disadvantage in the broad sense, as well as the Agreement's specific commitment to "combating unemployment and progressively eliminating the differential in employment rates between the two communities by targeting objective need."

It also points out that at the international level – from the 1948 Universal Declaration to the EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights in 2000 - not only has the importance of socio-economic rights been increasingly promoted, but there has been a growing recognition that social, economic, civil and political rights are interdependent.

Rarely can a set of proposals have faced such a fair wind - massive

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public and inter-communal approval, confirmed by democratic vote, and endorsed by international treaty and standards. However, precisely because the debate is taking place against such a favourable background, the proposals put forward by the Commission represent a deep disappointment. Is the Commission being overly influenced in advance by fears that the political establishment will not like moves in this direction?

## Core Flaws

There is a flaw at the very heart of the Commission's conception of social and economic rights in Northern Ireland and this means that two core and related elements are not addressed in any structured way.

First the relationship between social exclusion and inequality is dealt with in a wholly inadequate fashion, with the Northern Ireland context represented in at best a quixotic manner. The last thirty years should have convinced those charged with consulting on a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland that social stability, and social solidarity, while surely dependent upon many factors, need a foundation of equal treatment and equal opportunity.

Secondly, there is no acknowledgement that the debate on fair employment and equal opportunity has even taken place. The UN Covenant, the European Social Charter, and the EU Charter on Fundamental Rights are all mentioned but, as far as this chapter is concerned, neither fair employment nor equal opportunity legislation exist in Northern Ireland. Nor is mention made of how a new Single Equality Bill (now under discussion) could promote social and economic rights, nor how a Bill of Rights could sustain and support a comprehensive Equality Bill.

Chapter 14 on socio-economic rights needs to be read in close conjunction with the rest of the text, but particularly with Chapter 4 "Equality and non-discrimination."

In the latter, there is at least some recognition of the realities of Northern Ireland, acknowledging for example that our particular circumstances "necessitate more extensive rights than those found in Article 14 of the European Convention." Yet the relative robustness of this chapter is lost in the mush of Chapter 14, with bland statements such as "Everyone has the right to just and favourable conditions of work" (clause 3).

## Positive Action

Even in Chapter 4 there is evidence of some woolly, if not more sinister, thinking. Thus readers are asked if positive action should be *required*, rather than simply *permitted*. Yet the preceding section explicitly states that the Commission "... (notes) the extent to which positive action is *required* by the Agreement and by Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act..." (*emphasis added*) Question 13 is therefore another way of asking: should the Bill of Rights be able to overturn provisions of the Agreement or of legislation set up to implement them?!

## Pass the Parcel

From time to time the document is content to play Pass the Parcel, with courts and legislatures being encouraged in the vice of interpretation, rather than encouraged to practice the virtue of implementation. Clause 1 of Chapter 14 (p.88), for example, is described as "pivotal to the implementation of social and economic rights", and as a "positive development of the general equality duty imposed under section 75 and Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act". Schedule 9, however, calls for *participation* not merely consultation, but this crucial right and requirement of participation is not mentioned in the relevant clause.

## Nothing new?

Most seriously of all, one will only be able to seek redress through the courts if one can show that "due process" or "equality" rights have been infringed.

Since these rights are guaranteed elsewhere in the document, nothing new is added.

In fact, expectations are raised falsely. Without a socio-economic rights chapter, someone who could show that they were denied housing, or education, or work, on grounds of their race, or without due process, would have protection anyway.

On the other hand, the addition in the text of rights to education and housing etc. raises expectations among readers that there will be some additional protections over and above non-discrimination and due process. If this element of the interpretative clause is not altered, it is not clear why one would retain a socio-economic chapter at all!

Some quibbles: somebody has to appear in Chapter 14, but the Commission could have signalled the importance of social and economic Rights (a traditional "poor relation" in the rights debate) by moving it up the running order. The chapter is also called social, economic and environmental rights; the departure from the usual usage of social, economic and cultural rights is hardly justified by two clauses on the environment. And surely the State should have the duty to *ensure*, rather than just *foster*, participation in planning and decision-making, not just in this area, but in all social and economic areas covered by a Bill of Rights?

**Vinny McCormack**

### In the Headlines

CAJ holds newspaper clippings on more than 50 civil liberties and justice issues (from mid 1987-December 2000).

Copies of these can be purchased from CAJ office.

The clippings are also available for consultation at the office.

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

## ***Women Rights are Human Rights***

**Northern Ireland is often described as a rather traditional society, dominated by traditional 'values', 'family values'. We pride ourselves in the survival of family and community networks. Of course this has a down-side also. For many people in Northern Ireland who do not fit, or do not want to fit, into this 'traditional' scenery, the 'tyranny of the majority' can make it difficult to find a place and an identity. Perhaps even more strange is the place that women find themselves in - a numerical majority of the population but nevertheless a clear minority in terms of their share of the goods and benefits of this society.**

If a Bill of Rights genuinely addresses issues of protecting individuals and vulnerable groups, then women stand to gain significantly from current proposals.

Perhaps one of the most significant areas is the suggestion of addressing women's under-representation in public life and decision-making. Women in Northern Ireland made a considerable advance during the last General Election, with three being elected. However, it is easy to allow a small number of highly visible women to disguise the fact of the extensive absence of women from decision-making roles in public life. It is still the case that only 14% of Assembly members are women, 13% of local councillors are women and, although women represent approximately 30% of membership of public bodies, this disguises the fact that they are almost or actually absent from several.

The Scandinavian countries have the best representation of women in parliament – why? They argue that the different life experiences, interests and priorities of women (along with what they share with men) establish a more realistic environment in which to consider policies that effect real people and real families. They argue that since women make up at least 50% of the population, it is simply 'just' that they should have appropriate levels of representation. They also argue that the exclusion of women from public life robs the system of much of the pool of talents any country would surely want to draw upon.

Logic has suggested to Scandinavians that it is in the interests of society as a whole that women carry their share of the responsibility for decision-making and policy development. That being the case, policies and practices must assist in providing for such an outcome. 'Family-friendly' policies might be seen as some sort of concession to women, but it has also allowed male politicians to take paternity leave.

This would seem to suggest that ensuring the full participation of women in public life would have ramifications far beyond the symbolic fairness of it. There are a number of specific policy areas that could be enhanced by the greater participation of women, underpinned by protection through a Bill of Rights.

Women tend to be over-represented in many of the pockets of society that experience economic deprivation - lone parents, the elderly, those described as 'economically inactive'. There is no easy fix to the compound and complex circumstances that many women experience as disadvantage, but establishing a minimum standard and a pro-active approach begins to address some of these problems.

Women's contribution to the economy is often overlooked. Caring roles are rarely paid, and the general lack of recognition of this work belies its significance both in terms of its contribution to the economy and as a barrier, in itself, to women's participation in public life and the workplace.

The inequitable position of women in terms of their restrictive access to reproductive rights compared to elsewhere in the United Kingdom remains a significant source of exclusion. Support for the right of access to abortion is widespread in our society, a view not represented amongst the almost entirely male Assembly. This raises an issue that will effect many people, in many different circumstances. When the majority or the mainstream says 'No', will a Bill of Rights protect the rights of the quieter and more marginalized voices?

The NI Human Rights Commission asks whether rights pertaining to the circumstances in which women find themselves should be gathered into a specific section on women, or dispersed through the document - to 'mainstream' or set apart? Whilst it is attractive to consider mainstreaming as the goal, in practice perhaps a more focused approach is needed. We need to bear in mind that several decades of equal opportunities legislation in a range of fields has not, yet, established gender equality. An equal opportunities approach can miss the bigger picture of achieving more equal outcomes. And when a numerical majority has thus far failed to achieve a 'mainstream' position in, and share of, this society, we need to also consider the position of all the other under-represented sections of this society.

There is a strong argument for a more pro-active obligation on decision-makers to address the right, and responsibility, of our citizens to play an active part in the social, economic and political life of this society.

The symbolism of gathering the rights of women into a single section of the Bill of Rights, whether they deal with violence against women, reproductive rights, or having equal access to the full range of other rights is an important statement that this society intends to build on our strengths, not neglect our assets.

***Barbara McCabe***

## Draft Bill of Rights and the Administration of Justice : On the Right Track

The provisions of the Human Rights Commission's draft Bill of Rights with regard to criminal justice and the administration of justice are amongst the most potentially significant sections of entire document. If fully enacted (an admittedly big "if"), and augmented as discussed below, the Bill of Rights could dramatically improve the efficiency, effectiveness and legitimacy of the Northern Ireland criminal justice process. Some examples:

### ***Right to Life***

Article 2 of the European Convention of Human Rights contains the key provisions relating to the right to life. This has been expanded to include a new paragraph to reflect the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials. As the Commission candidly admits, a debate emerged in their deliberations on the final wording of this new paragraph as to whether or not to add the final wording of the UN principles that *"In any event, intentional lethal force may only be used when strictly unavoidable in order to protect life."* The only possible rationale for excising such an important sentence would be to continue to give the security forces in Northern Ireland greater flexibility in using lethal force than was envisaged necessary by those who drafted the UN Principles. There was little justification for such an approach in the worst days of the conflict, and there is certainly less now.

### ***Right to Liberty and Security***

The Commission proposes a number of important additional safeguards with regard to rights concerning arrest, searches and questioning. Article 5 of the European Convention has been expanded, in line with judgements by the European Court, to ensure that a person has the right not to be searched or to have their property seized unless *"it is in accordance with a reasonable and proportionate procedure prescribed by law."* The Commission rightly argue that search and seizure have been used as a tool of harassment against certain sections of the community.

On access to a solicitor, the Commission has inserted in the relevant paragraph *"of his or her choice"* in square brackets and flagged this issue as one for discussion. The main arguments previously raised against allowing access to solicitors of one's choice have been unproven, despite some quite disgraceful statements that some solicitors were *"unduly sympathetic"* to their paramilitary clients. The rule should be, unless there are persuasive arguments why a progressive provision should not be included, put it in !

### ***Right to silence***

The Commission is to be particularly commended for their recommendation that the right to silence be reintroduced. As they rightly argue, the integrity of this right has recently been upheld in criminal trials as important as the War Crimes Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. In a similar fashion, their recommendation that a person who is detained should be charged or released within 24 hours unless the court orders an extension for exceptional reasons is very welcome. The Commission has rightly taken the view that such a provision would encourage a more appropriate use of arrest powers, to interrogate a suspect based upon existing evidence, rather than using arrests in order to gather intelligence. The Commission has also recommended that all interviews should be both audio and video recorded, and that solicitors should be present during questioning.

### ***Right to A Fair Trial***

The Commission has recommended the extension of Article 6 of the European Convention to include a specific provision that all individuals remanded in custody have the right not to spend more than 110 days in custody before the commencement of a trial for an indictable offence – such rights only to be removed when the interests of justice require this. Of course, there would need to be some clarity as to the *"interests of justice"*. Nonetheless, their plain view is that the fact that such a system seems to work perfectly well in Scotland should forever eradicate the outrage of a few years ago where suspects spent two and three years on remand. The Commission also reiterated its commitment to the right to silence during trial. It has (if rather tentatively) also included a provision designed to reintroduce the right be tried by a judge and jury for anyone charged with a serious criminal offence.

### ***Conclusion***

Many other positive provisions exist, though it is surprising that there is no proposal to prohibit indeterminate sentences. The provisions on bail also seem very problematic.

However, as indicated above, if implemented and supplemented in a number of key areas, this document offers the potential for a radical change in the culture and operating practice of the criminal justice process. Let's not get too excited however! Previous experience of progressive elements of the peace process would suggest that there is still a long way to go.

***Kieran McEvoy***

## THE BILL OF RIGHTS AND YOUNG PEOPLE

### The Youth Forum along with schools and youth groups across Northern Ireland conducted a Bill of Rights Roadshow in March 2001.

That Roadshow showed 94% of young people believe everyone in NI deserves human rights. 76% of young people believe that a Bill of Rights is very important for NI, and 23% believe it to be quite important. When asked why a Bill of Rights is important the most common reply is "to establish equality". For one reason or another, 62% of young people felt their own human rights have been violated.

The top ten rights that young people felt should be included in the new Bill of Rights were: ● Freedom of speech, including the right to be heard and listened to ● the right to equality, and for young people to be treated with the same respect as adults ● freedom of religion, which included the right to practice and not to practice any religion ● cultural expression, for all cultures ● rights

for the disabled ● right to a good education, including having a say in the curriculum, good teaching, respect in the classroom and proper funding; ● free third level education ● right to life ● sexual consent at 16 ● and finally, freedom of expression.

The young people we met very quickly grasped the concept that rights are there for everybody. The Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland is for everyone here to take ownership. It involves everyone. It offers a protection for everyone. Young people also realised the important need to take responsibility for the rights formulated.

The Good Friday Agreement and the NI Human Rights Commission's remit highlights the 'particular circumstances of Northern Ireland.' The rights of children and young people are clearly covered by this concept of

'particular circumstances'. They have grown up and continue to grow up in a sectarian, violent and unequal society. The rights of children and young people must be prominent in this document. The 'particular circumstances' clause means that all young people should be given an extra hand to compensate for the violence and sectarianism that they have had to endure.

*"I believe human rights are important to young people as they are to everyone in society. They give young people a basis to voice their opinions on controversial matters. A Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland will provide a basis, and guidelines for people to live. They allow young people to have a voice over certain matters in a court of law, empowering and enabling young people to have an active voice in society."* Phil Conn, Chairperson of the Youth Forum, 21 years old, student nurse.

**Fiona Murphy**  
NI Youth Forum

## Enforcement

**A Bill of Rights is only ever as good as it can be useful in ensuring real change. The Commission's approach in the section on enforcement is generally to offer a number of options rather than to make firm proposals.**

The most important issue in this area is whether or not there will be a new Human Rights Court. The Commission states that it is *"as yet undecided as to whether a new court should be recommended for Northern Ireland"*. Instead it says that there are advantages and disadvantages in creating a new court and it invites views on this important topic. In the absence of the creation of a new court the existing court system would be tasked with implementing the Bill of Rights.

The CAJ has argued that the success of the Bill of Rights project is closely dependent on the creation of a new court. In its view any disadvantages which do exist are far outweighed by the positive contribution which a new court could make. It is disappointing that the Commission has retreated from the earlier position which it took in respect of the Criminal Justice Review. At that time it indicated support for the creation of a new court.

## Education in the Bill of Rights

**To an outsider looking in, education might not seem to be one of the most obvious areas for the NIHRC to prioritise in its recommendations to supplement the European Convention on Human Rights.**

The right to education is clearly stated in Article 2 of the First Protocol of the ECHR, and the lives of countless children in the United Kingdom have been transformed through the abolition of corporal punishment, following the Court of Human Rights' decision in *Campbell and Cosans v United Kingdom*. However, the Strasbourg Court's approach to the right to education has otherwise been unstintingly cautious with the result that the key issues which pervade the NI education system (such as selection on ability or parental preference for particular forms of education, such as Irish medium or integrated) have fallen squarely outside its remit.

The Commission has made six key recommendations, none of which will come as a surprise. These include: the extension of the right to education to include parents' right to have their child educated in integrated and Irish medium schools; an obligation to ensure a transparent and equitable system of state funding; and a requirement that education should be directed to the promotion of human rights etc. It also seems to have followed the recommendation of its Working Group on Education and provided a definition of what it meant by an "effective education".

Of most significance perhaps is the fact that the Commission has proposed to link access to education to its general non-discrimination clause. It is this proposal which would ultimately have most impact on the Northern Irish education system. The other recommendations are to a greater or lesser extent provided for in the existing domestic legal framework. However, including a prohibition on indirect discrimination on the grounds of religion in the context of a system which is almost completely religiously segregated could well have far reaching effects in matters such as school closures, funding and admissions.

The Commission has only posed two direct questions in the context of education. The first – "Should the Bill of Rights require the state to ensure that admission criteria for educational establishments ensure access to effective education?" - clearly arises out of the widespread concern about the fairness of the 11 plus and current admissions policies employed in NI's schools. However, genuine as these concerns are, it is difficult to see how such a clause might address them. The construction of the proposed right is awkward – admission criteria cannot ensure access to an effective education for all. The best admission criteria can do is to ensure that when

choices are made by schools, they can be justified. Moreover, the Commission's other recommendations (on a right to an effective education and a right not to be discriminated in access to education) would seem to have this covered. If everyone is getting an effective education and there are no unjustifiable barriers hindering their admission to individual educational establishments, it is difficult to see what additional protection someone might get from the proposal as presently constructed.

The second question relates to the ongoing exemption in relation to the employment of teachers in fair employment legislation. The Commission questions whether this exception should be removed and offers a provisional recommendation that it should be restricted to situations where there is a genuine occupational qualification. The issue has just been raised elsewhere as part of the consultation for the Single Equality Bill. Moreover, the question has already been addressed to some extent by the EU Framework Directive which includes an exception for NI's schools in relation to the recruitment of teachers, but prohibits religious discrimination in matters relating to promotion other than where this is a genuine occupational requirement. It might have been helpful to have explained this and then asked whether the anti-discrimination provisions should also extend to recruitment.

In some ways what is most striking about the recommendations is what the Commission has not included, as opposed to what it has. For instance, there is no specific mention of the rights of children with special educational needs (beyond what is inherent in the right to an effective education); nor the rights of ethnic minorities for recognition of their culture and language. Their absence can be explained to some extent by the Commission's continuing debate about what the "particular circumstances of NI" in the Agreement really means. However, it does seem a bit odd that it appears to have adopted a very generous interpretation of the phrase in its general recommendations on children's rights but in the area of education (arguably one of the most significant aspects of *all* children's lives), it has restricted itself to plugging the obvious gaps.

A decision as to the proper remit of the Bill of Rights is needed urgently. In education as elsewhere, it could make the difference between a Bill of Rights which simply tailors the ECHR to cope with a few Northern Irish idiosyncrasies, or one which provides the dynamic charter of rights which many hope for.

**Laura Lundy**  
School of Law, QUB

The following article is taken from the Belfast Telegraph supplement dated 26th October 2001

## The rights of victims and survivors

**My wife was murdered eight years ago this month leaving me to raise my two year old daughter. The bomb also claimed my father in law and nine other people. That particular week, in 1993, was one of the bloodiest in Northern Ireland's 'troubles'. In total around nineteen men, women and children were butchered in terrorist attacks at Shankill, Kennedy Way and Greysteel.**

I believe we have come along way since those dark days - the Belfast Agreement and the setting up of the Northern Ireland Assembly has given us the chance of a brighter future. It is my opinion that the proposed Bill of Rights could be another step along that road. For that reason I welcome the draft Bill but believe it to be imperative that the public responds to the consultation process.

Of particular significance to me is the section on 'victims'. I agree with the principles on which the Human Rights Commission, (HRC), have based their provision, namely,

- The opportunity for story telling;
- An acknowledgement of the loss and suffering of all victims of the conflict;
- The need for an independent and public process for dealing with the past; and
- The provision of appropriate care and support for all those affected

These principles, if properly acted upon, will bring healing for many who have suffered.

One area that causes me concern, however, is the distinction that the HRC has made between 'past victims of conflict' and 'future victims of crime'. The HRC suggests, "that it is not practicable to deal" with these "in an identical manner".

In relation to the past they feel that a Bill of Rights should provide for those who have suffered by offering them the highest level of social and civil care. With respect to the future, they advocate setting new standards to criminal investigation and suggest that victims, if they wish, be "entitled to restorative justice and fair compensation". Should this not be available to all victims, regardless of when the crime against them was committed? If victims are to feel part of the new Northern Ireland, justice must be part of the healing process.

In my opinion this does not necessarily mean that perpetrators will be returned to prison. Justice is bigger than that, involving reparation, compensation, truth telling and those responsible for much of the violence publicly acknowledging the hurt and pain they have caused, irrespective of whether it was Republican, Loyalist or State Forces.

The Draft Bill of Rights is not complete, there is still time for the public to shape the final version. Some rights that might also be included are: the right to be consulted when the media plan to use film footage of bomb blasts and murders some of which are shown for years after atrocities; the right to have bodies returned for burial, (particularly relevant to the families of the disappeared); the right of surviving relatives to sue for defamation of character if murdered relatives are defamed; the right to compensation; and the right to know the truth and the right not to know.

These are only a few rights. If you have been affected by the conflict and can think of others, please respond. This is an opportunity to make a difference. I would like to welcome the consultation process on a proposed Bill of Rights and specifically those rights which relate to victims/survivors.

**Alan McBride**

Victims Representative on the Civic Forum

Transcripts are now available from the office for the following lectures on a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland, hosted by CAJ (May 2001).

*"Socio-Economic Rights in a domestic charter of rights – a Canadian perspective"* by Bruce Porter, Executive Director, Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation And Co-ordinator, Canadian Charter Committee on Poverty Issues 21 pages, A4 format.

*"A Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland: some international lessons"* by Sir Nigel Rodley, University of Essex (UN Special Rapporteur on Torture and UK member of the UN Human Rights Committee) 12 pages, A4 format.

## Action Column

**The deadline for receipt of submissions to the NI Human Rights Commission on a Bill of Rights is 1st December 2001. We would urge everyone to make a submission to the Commission at this vital stage in the Bill of Rights debate.**

- In the next issue of Just News, we will be reporting on the United Nation's Human Rights Commission's examination of the UK report and also updating our readers on the CAJ's AGM.

## Civil Liberties Diary

**Sept 1** Patten Commissioner Dr Gerard Lynch has expressed dissatisfaction with the new policing implementation plan. He expressed particular criticism at its failure to address the flawed powers of the policing board and the provisions exempting serving RUC officers from taking the human rights oath.

**Sept 6** The Citizens Advice Bureau in Derry has claimed millions of pounds in state benefits are left unclaimed each year through lack of adequate advice. Judd McKinney recommended people avail of advice from groups like CAB because it provided independent and confidential advice to people regarding their statutory rights.

**Sept 7** New deprivation indicators of socially disadvantaged areas, reveal urban areas in Belfast and Derry as the worst in N.I. The report was launched by Mark Durkan, Minister for Finance and Personnel, and includes recommendations and measures that can be used to assess various levels of deprivation at local level.

**Sept 8** N.I. comes bottom of a list of industrial nations in adult literacy. Around 260,000 adults – almost a quarter of the adult population - are classified as having a serious literacy problem.

**Sept 9** Amid the worsening situation at Holy Cross Girls Primary School in Ardoyne which culminated in yesterday's blast bomb attack on pupils, North Belfast MLA Alban Maginness, after witnessing more scenes of violence said there could be no excuse for such utter sectarianism, such overt and open hatred. "The core of these events is pure hatred of Catholics, nothing more."

**Sept 11** Under present laws in N.I. victims of abuse can receive compensation only if a claim is lodged within three years. This rule is preventing some 250 adults who suffered sexual abuse, from claiming damages. New legislation is being drafted and an amnesty will allow fresh claims to be made.

**Sept 15** At a major conference on disability and careers, people argued that disability cannot be seen just as a health issue but must be regarded also in terms of human rights, equality, education and other social development issues.

**Sept 17** Belfast Travellers have left one of the longest established halting sites in the city. The site at Colin Glen had been home to Travellers for over a decade.

**Sept 20** A major new initiative to assist disabled people secure employment has been launched through "New Deal for Disabled People". Called 'Job Brokers', it provides support for those on incapacity benefits to find fully paid work.

**Sept 21** The UUP and DUP have agreed to take their seats on the new police board. Several trainees for the Police Service of N.I. will begin training in October for service on the streets in the spring of 2002.

**Sept 24** Ulster TV has paid out £40,000 to a former employee after admitting that she was the victim of sex discrimination as irregularities had occurred in an internal appointment.

**Sept 26** Edwin Poots MLA attacked the Human Rights Commission discussion of lifting

of the ban on homosexuals giving blood. He claimed it was a human right for people who were receiving blood to know that it was not contaminated by HIV virus. Monica McWilliams of the Women's Coalition branded his remarks as 'disgraceful'.

**Sept 27** Education Minister Martin McGuinness has announced at a human rights conference that special teaching posts will be advertised to help raise awareness of human rights issues in N.I. The Human Rights Commission is working closely with the Department of Education to promote a human rights culture in the education sector.

*Compiled by Peter Gahan from various newspaper sources.*

### Just News

Just News welcomes readers' news, views and comments.

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