

Bulletin of the Committee on the Administration of Justice

Good Housekeeping

A Single Equality Act for Northern Ireland

Last April saw perhaps the single most significant development in the furthering of the 'equality agenda' within Northern Ireland since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement. At last Northern Ireland is to have one piece of equality legislation that will bring all protected categories under the roof of a 'Single Equality Act'. The anomaly that currently exists whereby different pieces of legislation protect different groups in different ways is to be removed. An opportunity now exists to finally put in order the "cold house" which is how David Trimble described Northern Ireland in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech.

CAJ's task over the coming months will be to ensure that the heat from the proposals is sufficient and wide enough to deliver an Indian summer of equality – for all those who caught a chill. It is crucial to understanding the debate around the Single Equality Bill consultation paper however that one casts an eye beyond Stormont and the Offices of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. While the Good Friday Agreement placed a significant focus on equality and human rights, much of the momentum behind the Single Equality Bill has come from that most reformed of cities - Amsterdam.

The view from Amsterdam

The Amsterdam Treaty, which amended the Treaty establishing the European Community and the Treaty on European Union, provided the European institutions with considerable new powers. Indeed at a recent conference in Dublin, Professor Christopher McCrudden pointed out that European equality law is in the process of being subsumed within a broader human rights discourse, and

that the Amsterdam Treaty is likely to

**CAJ's
Annual General Meeting
will take place on
Tuesday, 23rd October 2001
@ 7.30pm in the
Law Centre, 124 Donegall Street,
Belfast**

All Members Welcome

seem in retrospect a defining moment in the acceptance of a broader notion of equality.

Within one and a half years of the entry into force of the Amsterdam Treaty the Council of Ministers had adopted the Racial Equality Directive and the Equality in Employment Directive (June and November 2000 respectively), with which Member States are required to comply. The effect of the two Directives has been to encompass a more inclusive ideal of equality, to one that includes race, ethnic origin, disability, religion and belief, sexual orientation, and age. Both Directives require 'national

implementing legislation' and it is in this context that we should view the Single Equality Bill. It is important to remember also that both Directives lay down *minimum* requirements for states with regard to equality thus giving member states the option of introducing or maintaining more favourable positions. Indeed as a recent report, published by the European-wide campaign group 'Starting Line' has pointed out,

'Like all other European measures, and especially those requiring unanimity, the Racial Equality Directive is the result of negotiations between the Member States and therefore a compromise. It is possible that individual governments would be willing to apply – in general or on specific issues – higher standards than those required by the Racial Equality Directive'

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Significantly however, both Directives also very clearly state that implementation, 'shall, under *no* circumstances constitute grounds for a reduction in the level of protection against discrimination already afforded by Member States'. As with any proposed changes to equality legislation rumours have circulated that the Single Equality Bill might be used to somehow 'dumb-down' equality provisions existing in Northern Ireland. As we pointed out in our submission to OFMDFM, any move toward reductions in the level of protection existing currently within Northern Ireland would be contrary to the Directives and unlawful.

The view from Westminster

It is worth pointing out that a number of reports emanating from Westminster have also highlighted the weaknesses of existing equality provisions. For example, the House of Lords Select Committee on the European Union recently stated that 'effective anti-discrimination legislation must do more than provide individual remedies - it must actively encourage public authorities and employers to promote equality'. Meanwhile in the lower house the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee recently concluded that in relation to fair employment measures, the legislation should be *strengthened* to include more proactive measures to cover areas such as contract compliance.

The view from the boardroom

In any debate surrounding forthcoming equality legislation, occasionally business leaders, and more often politicians cite the 'burden on business' argument. At its crudest, the neo-liberal line is that any legislative provisions which place requirements on business vis a vis who is employed and to whom services are delivered

interferes with the freedom of the market and costs jobs. Undoubtedly one of the main problems facing business has been the inconsistent and haphazard pieces of legislation designed to deal with discrimination in employment. In this respect, a single, simplified Act is likely to be a significant improvement.

It is also worth pointing out however that the 'business case' is more complex than the neo-liberals would have us believe. For example, in presenting evidence to the NI Affairs Committee, the Confederation of British Industry acknowledged that when the 1989 Fair Employment Act was introduced it was not welcomed with open arms in all quarters. The CBI went on to state however that since then:

'Many would see the positive benefits in terms of recruitment and selection, it has enabled them to carry out those processes in a much more objective and standardised way, possibly, than they would have done before'.

The view from Donegall Street

What then is the position of CAJ with respect to the Single Equality Bill? Well, as ever we will be campaigning for the government to introduce legislation that will reflect international best practice. We will also be arguing that there needs to be a revisiting of recommendations made previously by SACHR, the EOC and CRE, many of which are still outstanding. Furthermore, we will be arguing that the opportunity be taken to ensure that the legislation be extended across a range of categories, to ensure that eventual Act will conform to the protections offered by Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act and hopefully in due course the Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland.

The view from those most affected

One thing for sure is that CAJ won't have any shortage of partners on the 'campaign trail'. The beauty of a Single Equality Act is that it allows for all those who have suffered marginalisation and exclusion to work together to ensure a 'best practice' model is placed on the statute books. As Robin Allen QC pointed out at a recent conference, one of the advantages of linking the different grounds in the Framework Directive was that:

'the right would never agree to a Directive on sexual orientation alone but could not oppose a Directive in relation to disability'.

This is certainly a point worth taking board, no matter who's house is being put in order!

Tim Cunningham
Equality project worker

The CAJ submission on the Single Equality Bill (pps 36) is currently available from the office, price £3.00

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.

Enhancing Human Rights

Following four months of research, a report for the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission pertaining to the rights of lesbian, gay and bisexual people has been produced. The paper, issued on Thursday 24 August 2001 by the University of Ulster, is entitled 'Enhancing the rights of lesbian, gay and bisexual people in Northern Ireland. It evaluates the laws, policies and practices affecting lesbian, gays and bisexuals with reference to such anti-discrimination safeguards as EU equality law and international human rights law.

The report highlights the merits and demerits of the treatment of homosexuals in Northern Ireland across certain prominent fields including education and young people, employment and immigration. The report has found that discrimination 'pervades most areas' of criminal law, employment, education, housing law, health care, immigration, taxation, and social security.

This 'extensive' discrimination has 'significant adverse impact on the emotional, physical, social and economic rights ...of lesbian, gay and bisexual people.' The report has further alleged that the extent of this discrimination is regularly hidden both because of an absence of research, and a fear of 'outing,' hence the lower rate of accessing legal services amongst homosexuals.

Moreover, the report states that these problems have been enhanced by the failure of many governmental departments and statutory organisations namely the police who have 'outed' young people to neighbours and employers in the past according to the Children's Law Centre and the Northern Ireland Prisons Services 'which lacks specific policies' in relation to homosexuals.

Additionally, the report says that public authorities, although 'statutorily required to promote equality of opportunity in their policies and services for lesbian, gay and bisexual people' have not done so, with 'little evidence of policies or practices that affect lesbians, gays or bisexuals.' The report has issued a series of recommendations to address the seriousness of this situation. The paper advises that both the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland governments should repeal and/or amend any discriminatory law and enact law recognising same-sex partnerships through registration. Furthermore, the report advocates the creation of a task force by the Northern Ireland Assembly on gay, lesbian and bisexual issues. The report also says that research, in conjunction with homosexual organisations, is necessary in specific areas including housing, adoption, and vindication of rights and entitlements.

Via these recommendations, the report aims for a programme of action to be undertaken by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission in order to enhance the protection of rights for lesbian, gay and bisexual people in Northern Ireland.

Konrad Rodgers

Up to date with CAJ

There have been several meetings of the Equality sub group in order to complete the submission on the Single Equality Bill being proposed.

Maggie spoke at an event in West Belfast on the Bill of rights and Equality.

There have been meetings of the policing and Bill of Rights subgroups.

Martin attended the AGM of the Unemployed Resource Centre.

Liz attended the AGM for the Traveller Support group.

Maggie gave a presentation to a visiting group of students from Fordham Law School.

Martin, Paul and Tim attended the P.J. McGrory memorial lecture which was given by Michael Farrell.

Liz attended an event organised by the Equality Commission on facilities available for employers to enable and assist employees with disabilities.

Paul spoke to a visiting delegation from the Basque country.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank Fiona Doherty (US intern) for all her help over the past year, and to wish her well with her career in New York.

Congratulations to Fionnuala & Oren on the recent birth of their son, Aodhtan.

Finally, everyone at CAJ offer Martin O'Brien (CAJ's director) and his entire family their sincere condolences on the recent death of his mother, Anne.

Liz McAleer

Patten Implementation Plan from

The second version of the Patten Implementation Plan was issued in August 2001. There has been extensive media coverage of the reaction of the various political parties, but what does CAJ think from a purely human rights perspective?

Well, the message is mixed.

On the one hand, we were surprised that several of the problems commented upon in the first draft were not resolved before re-issuing. For example, the lead responsibility for the Patten recommendations on community policing, on normalisation, on policing structures etc. continues to lie with the Chief Constable and/or the Northern Ireland Office. References to the role of the Policing Board have improved greatly since the first edition of the Implementation Plan, but much responsibility is still retained by the Chief Constable and the NIO.

Why, for example, is the Policing Board given no lead responsibility for Patten's proposals to create dedicated neighbourhood police teams; increase foot patrols; close the Holding Centres; move to an unarmed police service; oversee the new system of District Commanders; establish a police appraisal system; reorganise police HQ; integrate the work of Special Branch more fully, and so on.

Given the very heated and public debate on the composition and role of the Policing Board, one must assume that this was not merely an oversight. Government presumably does not foresee the Board having any major responsibility in a number of these areas, so it will be very interesting to see what the reaction of the Board itself is, when and if it is established in the near future.

Role of Oversight Commissioner

In the same vein, it is interesting to see what role the government envisages the Oversight Commissioner playing. Apart from referring to the Commissioner in the context of those Patten recommendations which deal with the post being set up (reccs 172-175), the government only chooses to refer to the existence of this function in two other places in the 65+page document. The single new reference in comparison to the previous draft is the task of monitoring the use of the force's name. The single reference retained from the previous version is the need for the Commissioner to play a role in helping to encourage Catholic community leaders to remove obstacles to their co-religionists serving in the police. As we indicated when the previous edition was published, this is to turn the role of the Oversight Commissioner upside down. Whereas Patten talked of the review process providing "an important impetus to the process of transformation", it seems that

the government sees the Commissioner's major contribution as being more of a public relations nature!

More generally, in reaction to the updated Implementation Plan and the promises to create new legislation, our outstanding concerns can be noted as follows.

Human Rights

Patten made numerous human rights recommendations and though the proposals are much better now than previously (with, for example, more involvement of the NI Human Rights Commission and more accountability) no reference is made to the importance of protecting international human rights standards, other than those explicitly covered by the Human Rights Act. Indeed, this version takes out the single reference in the earlier version to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and, in that regard, is a step backward. Much is made in this section (and later in training) of the importance that is to be accorded to training the police in the Human Rights Act, but this is happening throughout the UK, and in no sense reflects a response either to the particular problems of NI or to Patten's concerns.

Accountability

Accountability was another major focus of Patten. Due to extended debates and lobbying, government has now agreed – by way of the revised Plan and/or future legislation – to review the composition of the Board (with a supplementary competition for independent members), to give the Board more powers, establish more financial and other accountability mechanisms for the Chief Constable, develop a best practice code covering the power of the Board to call for inquiries, and strengthen the role of the Police Ombudsman. This last gain is particularly significant, given the persistent refusal of the government in earlier discussions to agree to this Patten recommendation. CAJ's practical experience this summer has highlighted how it is particularly important in the context of public order to have an independent body capable of investigating police policies and procedures rather than one restricted to pursuing individualised complaints. While we are taking up concrete examples of problems in this area with the appropriate authorities, there is little to be done currently, and it is reassuring to see that this important legislative change has been promised by government.

We are of course still disappointed to see that no change is to be made to the fact that the Secretary of State must agree the appointment of anyone to head a Police Board inquiry, and that the power of the DPPs vis a vis the local District Commanders is no less ambiguous than it was previously.

a Human Rights perspective?

Public Order

Given the human rights issues arising around public order policing and the concerns about usage of plastic bullets, it was disappointing that the government chose to add only the Police Ombudsman, but not the NIHRC, to the list of those bodies to be consulted on plastic bullet guidance. Proposed legislative amendments to this effect were consistently opposed by government, but it would have been open to them to voluntarily impose this form of scrutiny upon themselves and on the Chief Constable. Certainly, the vituperative reaction of the Chief Constable to comments on plastic bullets from the NIHRC earlier in the summer suggests that, without an explicit commitment to consult the Commission, human rights perspectives may be given little weight.

Elsewhere, we note that the Implementation Plan quotes Patten twice (pages 49 and 51) to the effect that "people with serious criminal or terrorist backgrounds should (not) be considered for police service". It does not however cite the rest of the sentence that says that "young people should not be automatically disqualified for relatively minor criminal offences". It is not clear from the text of the Implementation Plan how much this concern of Patten's has been taken on board in the review of disqualifying criteria. Similarly, it is not clear if the government has formally rejected Patten's recommendation to hold a central register of police membership in various external bodies. While the Police Ombudsman will have access to the files of individual police officers to check for any potential conflict of interest, there appears to be no central register by which overall trends can be assessed.

This approach is particularly problematic given that the new oath to uphold human rights - intended to ensure - no conflict of interest between one's role as a police officer and one's membership in any external body, is now not to be taken by serving officers but only by new recruits.

Conclusions

So, the human rights message is mixed. There is no doubt at all that the changes made in the course of the legislative debate and in discussions around the Implementation Plan have brought about greater human rights safeguards and greater accountability. While many human rights groups felt that the Patten recommendations did not go far enough, there was a sense that it offered a programme for action which complied fairly well with the terms of reference set down by the Belfast Agreement, and with good practice around the world. There is no doubt that the final product now on offer is a lot closer to the Patten report, but it is deeply distressing to think how much effort had to be expended over the last year or more simply because the first legislative draft was so incompetent and inept.

Of course, we are still a long way from knowing how all this will work in practice and indeed if all the different political parties are willing to try and make it work in practice. Policing is obviously a deeply contentious political issue, but it is important not to lose sight of the fact that, if it is to work for the good of all, it must primarily be judged against the standards established by political consensus in the Agreement. Those standards are ones of impartiality of professionalism, accountability, representativity, and conformity with human rights principles.

Maggie Beirne

Stop press!

CAJ has just received the latest report of the Oversight Commissioner. This is only the second report in the fifteen months since the post was established even though the first (November 2000) report of the Commissioner envisaged that there would be three progress reports a year.

Our concerns with the first report (Just News February 2001) have not been allayed by the second report. The Oversight Commissioner seems to believe that outreach to the policed is important but is not his responsibility. Accordingly, the second report lists detailed performance indicators against which to measure Patten's recommendations, and explains that these indicators have been developed by work within the Commissioner's team and then an 11-day site visit involving "those individuals, agencies and institutions who will be subject to the monitoring process by the Oversight Commissioner". This would suggest that the police, policing authorities, but not the policed were all involved in the establishment of the indicators. CAJ does not believe that this approach encourages a shared ownership of the policing project.

We are preparing a response to the 772 Performance Indicators, but anyone wanting to learn about a group whose work is meant to be "more than a stocktaking function" and instead is to provide "an important impetus to the process of transformation" may be sorely disappointed. No comments are made on the major initiatives which have already been undertaken over the last fifteen months by the RUC regarding human rights, police structures, recruitment, training etc. There is no reassurance for those who fear that, in the absence of a Policing Board, the RUC is moving rapidly ahead to make the changes they are willing to undertake but not those that may be less attractive. The absence of a Police Board is obviously deeply regrettable, but it has been CAJ's oft-repeated assertion that the Oversight Commissioner should exercise more not less authority during this interim period.

Participation and the Practice of Rights: Insider/Outsider - Changing Relationships

Community groups, rights groups and trade unionists from north and south came together recently at a conference to begin a debate on how best to use international human rights standards and laws to challenge and change decision-making processes which affect their lives. The conference was jointly organised by Combat Poverty Agency, CAJ, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, Irish Council for Civil Liberties and NI Voluntary Trust.

The conference was very much designed to begin a debate and discussion among groups who while working on similar issues, may not necessarily have been talking the same language – so for example, groups working on poverty and social exclusion issues in inner city areas are not always aware of or comfortable with the large volume of standards and materials in international human rights law relating to these issues. Thus, the conference brought so-called ‘rights-experts’ together with other groups working on these issues on the ground to begin discussing how the two fields related to each other, and how groups could use these standards to participate more effectively in decision-making processes.

The actual conference was preceded by a dinner the night before, at which those in attendance watched a video from the office of the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights which addressed the intrinsic link between poverty and human rights. Participants then heard messages of support for the event from the UN High Commissioner herself, from the Secretary Of State, Dr John Reid; the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Brian Cowan and Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton. In particular, the High Commissioner commended the initiative by saying that:

“This is one of the issues of our time ... People need to develop the tools by which they can challenge their marginalisation, and indeed ‘unmake’ margins. Ireland in this regard may have something to teach the world.”

The opening address of the actual conference was given by Inez McCormack, then President of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, who set the scene in terms of the need for groups to affect change by learning how to participate and use the new national and international ‘tools of right’. The morning session then heard from Jim Deery and Seanie

Lambe, who spoke of their work in inner-city community groups in Belfast and Dublin respectively, and the kinds of issues facing them on a daily basis. This was immediately followed with a presentation by Gerard Quinn, a law lecturer from NUI Galway, who briefed participants on the principles of economic and social rights, not just internationally, but at a national level.

The conference was then split into workshops who were all asked to look at *inter alia*, whether rights language was useful or relevant in their work, what they saw as the main obstacles to participation in decision-making processes, and whether various government policies aimed at tackling social exclusion were actually working on the ground. A lively discussion was held in each workshop with participants getting the chance to draw on some of what they had heard that morning.

Mr Felix Morka, Director of the Social and Economic Rights Action Centre in Lagos, Nigeria, then opened the afternoon session. Mr Morka shared with the audience some reflections on the themes of poverty, rights and participation from an international perspective. The rest of the afternoon was spent in panel discussions, with panellists including Martin Collins, Pavee Point; Elaine Harvey, Galway Unemployed Resource Centre; Tony O’Reilly, North West Forum of People with Disabilities; Sean Healy, Conference of Religious in Ireland and Fiona McCausland, Old Warren Partnership in Lisburn. Each panellist was able to address participants on how the themes of the day were relevant to their own work.

Finally, Bea Campbell (English freelance journalist) and Mike Posner (Director of New York based Lawyers Committee for Human Rights) reported back to the conference on what they felt were the main issues which had arisen during the day, as well as possible ways of taking the debate forward. There was a consensus among all those in attendance that the conference had been a welcome and ground-breaking event and had more than fulfilled its goal of opening a debate in this area. Many were keen that the momentum created by this conference be maintained, and various ideas for a way to bring these issues forward and form alliances were proposed. The organisers were pleased with its success and will be producing a report in the coming months. However, it is clear that this is a debate that will be continuing for some time.

Aideen Gilmore

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Review of the Offences Against the State Acts

Among the items agreed as part of the Good Friday Agreement was an undertaking by the Irish Government to review the Offences Against the State Acts which allow for emergency-type powers of arrest and detention and under which the non-jury Special Criminal Court has existed since 1972. A review committee was established in 1999 under the chairmanship of former Supreme Court judge, Anthony Hederman. The Committee, which was made up of academics, legal practitioners, police representatives, civil servants and others considered submissions from a range of NGOs and consulted with the European Court of Human Rights and the UN Human Rights Committee (ICCL's submission can be downloaded from the Criminal Justice section of the ICCL website, www.iccl.ie/).

It has yet to publish its final report but, in August 2001, the committee issued an interim report to assist the Government in responding to the Kavanagh decision of the UN Human Rights Committee.

Mr. Kavanagh (who has no paramilitary connections) was convicted by the Special Criminal Court in 1997 of a range of offences arising from the kidnapping of National Irish Bank Chief Executive, James Lacey. He was tried on foot of a certificate issued by the Director of Public Prosecutions to the effect that the ordinary courts were "inadequate to secure the effective administration of justice" which he had unsuccessfully sought to challenge by way of judicial review. The Supreme Court effectively found that it was all but impossible to challenge such decisions of the DPP.

Mr. Kavanagh then made an application under the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the UN Human Rights Committee adopted its views in April of this year. The Committee found that Ireland was in breach of the ICCPR in that it failed to demonstrate that the decision to try Mr. Kavanagh before the Special Criminal Court was based upon reasonable and objective grounds contrary to Article 26 of the Covenant. It said the state was obliged to provide Mr. Kavanagh with an effective remedy and to give wide publicity to the decision. A ninety-day limitation period was imposed on the Government to inform the Committee as to how it proposed to give effect to its views.

In order to assist the Government in making a response to the UNHRC an interim report was issued by the Hederman Committee dealing with the role of the DPP in certifying

cases for trial by the Special Criminal Court. The interim report contained a majority opinion which outlined a range of options for reform of the DPP's role while supporting the continued existence of the Court. It also contained a dissenting minority opinion signed by the Committee Chairman, Mr. Justice Hederman and Professors Dermot Walsh (University of Limerick) and William Binchy (TCD) which called for an end to the Special Criminal Court and argued for a strengthening of measures to protect jury trial.

The Government responded to the Kavanagh decision at the very end of the 90-day limitation period. It referred to the majority opinion contained in the Interim Report of the Hederman Review Committee. It made no reference to the views of the dissenting minority nor to the existence of such a dissent. Mr. Kavanagh was offered compensation of IR£1,000 which, unsurprisingly, he rejected.

The majority opinion contained in the Interim Report, upon which the Government relied in its response, outlined a range of reforms to the current system of certifying cases for trial by the Special Criminal Court which were, presumably, proffered as ways of making that decision-making process more "reasonable and objective". It acknowledged that the current system for certification by the DPP was "all but impossible" to challenge legally. Calling for the abolition of the distinction between scheduled and non-scheduled offences the majority then addressed the question of the prosecution (through the office of the DPP) choosing the trial venue in certain cases. It outlined four options for a "positive review mechanism" of the DPP's decision. None of these options (bar one) would involve meaningful opportunities for the defence itself to dispute the bases upon which a case was certified for trial by the Special Criminal Court. The majority did not appear to favour one particular option over and above the other three and it is not yet clear which of these, if any, will provide the basis for whatever reform the Government pursues in responding to the Kavanagh decision.

The remainder of the Hederman Report is eagerly awaited. It will, among other things, consider the issue of the right to silence which has already led to adverse findings against Ireland before the European Court of Human Rights in the cases of Quinn and Heaney & McGuinness.

The UN Human Rights Committee has previously (in 1993 and 2000) called for an ending to the jurisdiction of the Special Criminal Court in its concluding observations on Ireland's two periodic reports under the ICCPR. One can only speculate about the likely conclusions of the UNHRC on Ireland's next examination in 2005 when, no doubt, a high-level Government delegation will keep a straight face before the Committee in Geneva and explain why the state has chosen to disregard its clear international human rights obligations ... again.

Donncha O'Connell, Director, ICCL

Civil Liberties Diary

Aug 1 The Pat Finucane Centre and Billy Wright's father David, have both raised concerns about the appointment of an international judge to investigate the death of Pat Finucane, Rosemary Nelson and others.

Aug 2 The RUC has said it has no plans to issue officers with the controversial 'stun gun'. The device is believed to be among a range of options being considered by the British government-led group, currently considering alternatives to the use of plastic bullets.

Aug 3 About 250 military witnesses are to be called to testify at the Saville Inquiry. Among them will be the Paratroopers who fire the lethal shots on Jan 30th 1972. The British military personnel involved claim that their safety is at risk. However the tribunal dismissed their claim and ruled that the Guildhall is where their evidence is to be given.

Aug 7 Human rights campaigners last night described the British Government's decision not to appeal a landmark European court ruling into investigations into the shooting of republicans as 'very significant'. CAJ spokesman Paul Mageean said he believed the decision would pave the way for a revised inquest system in Northern Ireland.

Stormont ministers have launched a Victims Strategy consultation document to address the needs of victims of the troubles.

Aug 13 To-day saw the publication of the policing reform package. Hopes are that the essentials of Patten can be achieved based on legislation and by following the detailed implementation plan.

Aug 16 Former RUC chief Sir Graham Shilling told the Bloody Sunday inquiry that security forces botched the introduction of internment in 1971.

Aug 17 An investigation into the extraordinary claims that the RUC

was warned about the imminent Real IRA bomb attack more than 48 hours before the atrocity in Omagh will be launched by the police ombudsman. The decision to intervene was made following allegations that an RUC agent tipped off his handler that a bomb was being made by a well known dissident republican. Relatives of the dead welcomed the inquiry.

Two Derry schoolboys have lost a legal battle to gain admission to their local grammar school. The school board applied its own criteria to decide who should be admitted. It was ruled that the school's criteria were not unlawful and were not in breach of the Human Rights Act.

Aug 20 The northern Catholic Bishops issued a statement on the updated implementation plan for policing in Northern Ireland. In it they welcome the emphasis on human rights in the new policy structures and state that young Catholics must feel free to choose whether or not to participate in the new policing service.

Aug 21 The US Government and a prominent member of the Patten committee, Maurice Hayes last night threw their weight behind the SDLP's decision to support new policing structures. However, the Derry based human rights organisation the Pat Finucane Centre said there are still a number of key ways in which the institutional and cultural conditions within the RUC could lead to further human rights abuses.

A Simon Community report, Homeless Families, Homeless Children, covering the western area Health and Social Services area, found that homeless families with children often find themselves sharing houses and communal hostels for periods of up to two years. Derry City and Strabane had 163 homeless children during the six months period prior to March.

Catholics are now significantly better represented in workplaces across NI than they were 10 years ago, according to the latest figure released by the Equality Commission. Chief commissioner Joan Harbinson said the overall improvement in the balance of the workforce showed that fair employment legislation was working.

Aug 23 The NI Human Rights Commission claims the laws in NI discriminate extensively against lesbian, gay and bisexual people. The report further claims that discrimination pervades most areas and reaches criminal law, employment education, health care, housing, immigration and the taxation and social security systems. The NIHRC has called on the Assembly to repeal laws that discriminate against gays lesbians and bisexuals.

Aug 30 The SDLP has urged the Human Rights Commission to be fully involved in the development of human rights standards and systems within the new police force. Talks have been held to ensure a quick and full implementation of Patten. Carmel Hanna has urged that the HR Commission be fully involved in the preparation of a police code of ethics, training and education strategy and an appraisal system for officers.

Compiled by Peter Gahan from various newspaper sources.

Just News

Just News welcomes readers' news, views and comments.

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