

Bulletin of the Committee on the Administration of Justice

## Mary Robinson in Belfast

**Mary Robinson, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights was the keynote speaker at a recent event organised by the Human Rights Consortium. The Consortium, co-convened by Amnesty and CAJ, marked the launch of its new name and logo by hosting a major seminar entitled, "Making Right Relationships an Everyday Practice". The seminar was held on Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> May in the W5, Odyssey Complex, Belfast. Mrs. Mary Robinson, spoke to an audience of approximately 300 community groups and local representatives, forming a broad span of social, legal, political and religious groupings in Northern Ireland.**



Mrs. Robinson's speech met with a standing ovation and it brought me back to the time when I first attended an address by Mary Robinson, in South Africa in the 1990s. That time she spoke, in her capacity as the then President of the Republic of Ireland, to the combined Houses of Parliament in Capetown. It was Nelson Mandela himself who led the standing ovation on that occasion. I recall Mandela afterwards musing that Mary Robinson's address challenged him to make South Africa a truly inclusive society – especially with reference to the rights of women. I think many of us who attended Saturday's event in the Odyssey were similarly inspired to help make the dialogue of human rights a living reality in our own community.

### **"Rights are not given – they must be claimed"**

Taking up the theme of *"making right relationships an everyday practice"*, Robinson called on everyone - carer, worker, and artist - to be a human rights defender and ensure respect for human dignity. She stated that the culture of human rights belongs to and should be shaped by all peoples in society. She put before her listeners the possibility of changing the insider/outsider paradigm so prevalent in contemporary society. She emphasised that rights are not given but must be claimed - not only on our

own behalf but also on behalf of the socially excluded and those without power. To *"make human rights visible"*, the marginalized must be helped to find their voice. By way of example Mrs. Robinson referred to the historic first session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (13-24<sup>th</sup> May 2002). The 16 member body, made up of 8 indigenous nominated experts and 8 experts nominated by governments and elected by ECOSOC, has been given a mandate to advise and make recommendations to ECOSOC on economic, and social development, culture, human rights, the environment, education and health.

**"Value the unsung, the unhealed in society and change the story..."**

True inclusiveness and respect for difference must underpin any successful human rights policy. Mrs Robinson congratulated the Human Rights Consortium on the remarkable range of groups and interests that it accommodates and praised its efforts in promoting dialogue and understanding as it worked for a strong and inclusive Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland.

She commented that although the discussion of rights is a complex issue, it is enriched by the exchange of divergent views from all members of society.

She illustrated how fixed perceptions can benefit from new ideas by relating the success of the recent UN Young People's Special Session held in the US where children up to the age of 18 years provided true and informed discussion on human rights issues. The current "special needs"

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## Update



### Human Wrongs – Human Rights *A Guide to the Human Rights Machinery of the United Nations*

Most people associate the United Nations with its peace-keeping role, seeing it as the body that tries – and often fails – to deal with problems such as those that have arisen in Kosovo. What they are aware of is the UN's political role. However, people are much less aware of the UN's role in setting international human rights standards and monitoring governments' adhering to them.

Because people have little knowledge of what their human rights are, they do not know how to enforce their rights if things go wrong. The UN has a whole array of mechanisms for helping people to obtain their rights and redress their wrongs, but lawyers, advice agencies, and voluntary and community groups usually know very little about them.

This guide sets out to change all that. It explains where to find out about human rights, how the UN human rights machinery works, and how to make effective use of it. Available from Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, Temple Court, 39 North Street, Belfast BT1 1NA Tel: 028 90243987 Fax: 028 90247844 email: [nihrc@belfast.org.uk](mailto:nihrc@belfast.org.uk)

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philosophy with its overtones of "by way of exception" and "special provision" was decried. Rather, the High Commissioner stressed the inherent dignity and rights of each and everyone. For the rule of law to prevail she reiterated that governments must respect and ratify the rights of every person.

### **"Be courageous and get it right"**

Mary Robinson stressed the need for a National Action Plan on Human Rights, as mandated by Britain's international obligations under the Declaration and Programme of Action from the Vienna World Conference of 1993 (paragraph 71). She commended the advent of the Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland as an important component of the National Action Plan and particularly congratulated the commitment of the members of the Consortium to attaching equal weight to economic, social and cultural rights as to civil and political rights. She nonetheless acknowledged the challenge ahead of building on existing achievements to effect the kind of transformation in Northern Ireland envisaged by the Peace Agreement. She related the experience of South Africa, whose national plan was launched on the 10<sup>th</sup> December 1997, stressing the

### *Up to date with CAJ*

Tim and Marny (US intern) attended the AGM of COSO (Coalition on Sexual Orientation).

CAJ hosted briefing events on PPP/PFI (Public Private Partnerships/Private Finance Initiative) and the Rates Review to members of the Equality Coalition. The policing sub group met.

There was a meeting of the Human Rights Consortium. Aideen attended a Human Rights Commission event for young people on a Bill of Rights.

Liz attended an Inland Revenue seminar.

Congratulations to Paul and Fiona for all their work in relation to the Dermot McShane case in the European Court of Human Rights (see report opposite)

Martin gave a talk on CAJ's work to a group of visiting students from University College, Dublin.

We would like to welcome Lisa Gambone from Columbia University, who will be interning with CAJ for the summer.

Finally, the staff and executive want to extend their sincere condolences to Liz McAleer on the recent death of her husband, Gerry.

importance of a real and meaningful consultation process. In asserting human rights she reminded us of the necessity to keep sight of means and ends. In reacting to events, such as those of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 we must be aware of the need to maintain a balanced and measured response. The threat of terrorism must not be used as an excuse for the denial of human rights. She concluded that Northern Ireland is now on an international stage and with courage and innovation has the potential to set the highest of standards that may be emulated worldwide.

Encouraged, inspired and energised by the High Commissioner's words, we were nevertheless made aware that the work of the Human Rights Consortium in lobbying for a strong and inclusive Bill of Rights is but a beginning! So let us "be courageous and get it right".

Monica Wilson of the Human Rights Consortium gave the vote of thanks, after which the High Commissioner greeted each person present individually. A full copy of Mary Robinson's speech is available on request and a video will shortly be produced.

**Brighde Vallely, CORI**  
**Member of Human Rights Consortium**

## **European Court of Human Rights Judgment on McShane v UK**

**The long battle to uncover the truth about the use of lethal force by the security forces in Northern Ireland has taken another step forward. The European Court of Human Rights has once again found the UK to have violated the right to life in respect of a security force killing in here, this time in connection with the death of Dermot McShane.**

Mr McShane was killed when the large wooden hoarding behind which he was sheltering was rammed by an army vehicle during the course of disturbances in Derry in July 1996. CAJ represented Mr McShane's widow before the European Court of Human Rights.

The Court found that Article 2 of the European Convention (the right to life) had been violated because the investigation of the death of Dermot McShane was inadequate for the following reasons:

- (i) Police investigating the deaths were not independent of the police officers implicated in the incident;
- (ii) The police investigation showed a lack of expedition;
- (iii) The soldier who drove the APC which fatally injured Dermot McShane could not be required to attend the inquest as a witness;
- (iv) The inquest procedure did not allow any verdict or findings which could play an effective role in securing a prosecution in respect of any criminal offence which may have been disclosed;
- (v) The non-disclosure of witness statements and other relevant documents contributed to long adjournments in the proceedings;
- (vi) The inquest proceedings have not commenced promptly.

### **"A chilling effect"**

In addition to its finding on Article 2 the Court further found that the UK had been in breach of its obligations under Article 34 of the Convention. Article 34 states

*"The Court may receive applications from any person, non-governmental organisation or group of individuals claiming to be the victim of a violation by one of the High Contracting Parties of the rights set forth in the Convention... The High Contracting Parties undertake not to hinder in any way the effective exercise of this right."*

The RUC had complained to the Law Society that the solicitor acting for Mrs McShane at the inquest into her husband's death had passed documents to CAJ which

were then used in the preparation of our submissions to the Court of Human Rights. The Law Society dismissed that complaint but the Court, in finding a violation of Article 34, said

*"A sanction was invoked by a public authority against a solicitor in respect of her purported disclosure of information to an applicant for use in proceedings before this Court. The Court finds that this could have a chilling effect on the exercise of the right of individual petition by the applicants and their representatives."*

The decision in *McShane v UK* consolidates the position on the state's obligation to investigate killings by its servants or agents. This obligation, which arises from Article 2 of the Convention, was most recently and significantly addressed in the Northern Ireland cases of *Kelly & others, McKerr, Shanaghan and Jordan v UK* (4<sup>th</sup> May 2001). The decision in *McShane* is a timely reminder as to the lack of action taken by the government in response to those judgments (now over a year old) and the stinging criticisms levelled at the police investigation and inquest procedures by the Court.

Readers may know that proceedings taken to force the state to institute Article 2 compliant investigations in two of those cases, *Jordan* and *McKerr*, have been met with robust opposition by the state at every opportunity. It is quite clear that many, if not most, of the cases of security force killings in Northern Ireland over the past thirty years have not been adequately investigated. It also appears that the government is alive to this, and is making every effort to restrict the possibilities open to families so that it does not have to re-investigate the scores of deaths whose circumstances are legally indistinguishable from cases like that of *Dermot McShane*.

**Paul Mageean**

### **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.**

**‘Paramilitary Imprisonment in Northern Ireland:  
Resistance, Management and Release’**

**This book offers an important contribution to prison literature in Northern Ireland, and is based on substantial and detailed fieldwork. It has developed an innovative and sophisticated theoretical approach to paramilitary imprisonment. Indeed this is the first time I have seen work of this kind carried out on the penal system in Northern Ireland. McEvoy has provided a penetrating look at the internal dynamics of penal institutions in Northern Ireland.**

McEvoy begins with the necessary background, outlining the main protagonists to the conflict and addresses the difficulties surrounding the concept of "political prisoners" in Northern Ireland. He provides a powerful discussion of the theoretical literature on imprisonment and explores a number of arguments surrounding the concept of "resistance". Based upon interviews with former loyalist and republican prisoners as well as staff, this book locates four forms of prisoner resistance including dirty protest & hunger strike; violence; destruction and intimidation; escape; and resorts to the law. McEvoy investigates each one thoroughly, with particular awareness of the centrality of the campaigns in the prisons to those going on outside.

As well as providing a detailed chronology of the events surrounding the hunger strikes and dirty protest, the author offers the reader insightful accounts of the prisoners experience.

Violence within the prison system, whether it was the destruction of the buildings, violence against prison staff or other inmates, demonstrated itself as a frequently used technique by serving prisoners in order to defy the existing prison regime. McEvoy examined the tactics used by republicans and loyalists. He contends that it was the tactics and agitation of loyalist prisoners, which led to the subsequent moves towards segregation according to political allegiance. The book explains the various interplay between both loyalist and republican prisoners. One striking example of this interplay was the decision by the republicans 'to stand back while the loyalists made the running' to secure segregation for remand prisoners. This 'stand back' approach was also something the loyalist prisoners did when the republicans were taking part in the hunger strikes and dirty protests. The book also

demonstrates how prisoner attitudinal change towards the law led to prisoners successfully using legal tools of resistance throughout their incarceration.

McEvoy investigates the strategies used by the prison authorities, and presents three models of prison management including; the reactive containment of the early years; the catalysts for, and effects of, the criminalisation policy; and the more managerial approach that has characterised most of the past two decades. He thoroughly details the conversion of prison authorities strategies. These strategies shifted from a pragmatic recognition of political status for inmates, through to the outright denial of the political character of the conflict.

### **Prisoner Release**

Finally, the book considers the release of paramilitary prisoners and its relevance to the conflict resolution process in Northern Ireland. This is a very important section of the book as it establishes the purpose prisoner release has had to play in many post conflict situations. Since the beginning of the peace process, the prisoner release scheme has often been criticised. However, McEvoy stresses the importance of such a measure by outlining its historical and international standing and considering all its implications.

Apart from the closing chapters, (which deal with prisoner release and the importance of collective memory), the book is clearly given over to lengthy examinations of the strategies employed by both the prisoners and prison authorities since the beginning of the 'troubles'. Essentially, this book stands out as a unique philosophical and thematic analysis of political imprisonment in Northern Ireland.

This is a timely and stimulating book, and one whose relevance for criminology is readily apparent. It provides the reader with an interpretative account of the author's research findings, which are intriguing and exciting. This is a highly readable and interesting piece of work, well written and thought provoking.

**Claire Digney**

Paramilitary Imprisonment in NI: Resistance, Management and Release - Kieran McEvoy (Oxford University Press 2001; 374pp. £45.00)

## Plastic bullets OK?

**Given the criticism of the Police Ombudsman after her report into the Omagh investigation, she must have been relieved to be more conciliatory in her report on plastic bullet firing. This report gives the police a much cleaner bill of health. The problem is that whilst her findings are important and useful, the omissions from the report are even more telling.**

The published report summarises several fuller reports submitted to the Chief Constable and Policing Board and relate to seven separate incidents over a period of approximately ten months, when the police discharged 36 plastic bullets. The access of the Ombudsman to official material such as baton round discharge reports, CCTV recordings, police command and control audio recordings, etc. is obviously crucial to carrying out any effective assessment of the situation on the ground. Taken together with 'alternative perspectives' – civilian witness statements, interviews with local community leaders, and media coverage – such material should give a reasonably comprehensive picture. It is very important that serious scrutiny is applied to each and every firing of a plastic bullet given their lethal potential, and the first report ever of this kind must therefore be welcomed.

There are, however, a number of missing perspectives that mean that the positive assessment by the Ombudsman of the use to date of plastic bullets is seriously misleading.

Firstly, there are several issues raised in her report which beg bigger questions but are left hanging. Leaving aside the obviously crucial debate about whether plastic bullets are ever acceptable, the report notes that there is apparently "little forensic value in seizing a (plastic bullet) weapon". But why, with the advances in forensic science, has it proved impossible to link bullets to specific guns, as with live ammunition? Elsewhere, we learn that the 'strike rate' was 78% ie 22% failed to reach their target. Given the much-vaunted improved accuracy of the new weapon, it is surprising that the Ombudsman makes no comment on this failure rate. Some 10% of bullets appear to have hit the upper body, though the guidelines state that bullets must be fired "*to strike directly (ie without bouncing) the lower part of the target's body ie below the rib cage*". Again, there is no analysis of the reasons for this 10% failure rate.

While welcoming the fact that the Ombudsman checked on warnings given, it is surprising that although the guidelines require warnings to be given "*unless circumstances do not permit*", there were at least two incidents out of seven when this did not happen. This seems a high proportion, but the

Ombudsman does not comment. We were also surprised at the low level of complaints received – is this something that the Ombudsman intends to follow up? Last but not least, CAJ thinks that it would be very helpful in future to try and record information about the intended and actual targets. References, for example, are frequently made to "youths" throughout the text, and there has always been grave concern about the high proportion of children who have suffered fatalities from this weapon. Are there any issues relating to children and young people that require re-thinking as a result of the Ombudsman's report?

Secondly, there is the issue of the powers under which the Ombudsman carries out such investigations. A protocol has been agreed between her office and the Chief Constable to the effect that the latter "*regularly refers incidents relating to the discharge of baton rounds by police officers*" to the Ombudsman. Although this protocol has been agreed pursuant to the Police (NI) Act 1998, the legislation is narrowly drawn, and a new Chief Constable could well want to re-negotiate the protocol. In CAJ's view, it would be good to put this authority onto a sounder legal footing. But the really glaring omission from this report relates to the army firing of plastic bullets. The Ombudsman's remit is restricted to the police, but CAJ believes that it would have been open to her to comment on growing concerns about the role played by the army, and the lack of proper accountability mechanisms in this regard. More importantly, one is left unclear as to the facts on the ground: there are conflicting reports about the number of plastic bullets fired – is this linked to army/police overlap? While CAJ welcomes the tightening up of scrutiny with regard to the police firing of plastic bullets, this will all serve little or no purpose, if the army increasingly take on the task of firing plastic bullets instead of the police. The army has refused to put their guidelines into the public domain and there is no army equivalent of either the Policing Board or Police Ombudsman.

This is the first report of its kind. Many of the issues raised above may be addressed in forthcoming reports. It will, however, be important that the Ombudsman not allow the media or others to mis-represent her findings.

CAJ has written to the Ombudsman, we remain concerned that the Ombudsman's report, and the media coverage thereof, implies all is well, when in our view it is not.

**Maggie Beirne**

## Overdue Rating Policy Reforms

**The system of rates, which has not been radically changed in Northern Ireland since its introduction in 1852 (sic!), is being reviewed with the intention of introducing a fairer system. A few facts jump out from any study of the issue:**

- Manufacturing industry and agricultural land/buildings are currently “de-rated” i.e., they do not pay rates. (Industrial de-rating was introduced as a protectionist measure in 1929, but abolished in England and Wales in 1963; NI is unique in maintaining the system) If this situation were to change, the government funding pool would be £280 million better off;
- rental values which determine domestic rates date from 1976;
- the rate relief system has grown unsystematically – it includes farm houses, churches, freight transport, public leisure centres, etc.; and
- vacant properties are not rated, resulting in a loss in revenue of £45m.

The government’s Review of Rating Policy\* discusses possible reforms but seems to remove from the debate the possibility of rating the agriculture sector and is more keen on adding reliefs instead of questioning existing ones.

Under consideration are issues such as:

- taxing ownership instead of occupation of property;
- using a capital value system (either individual or banded) instead of one based on rental value;
- providing relief for sole householders, the elderly, and/or the disabled;
- providing relief graduated on an income basis;
- providing non-domestic rural reliefs and/or reliefs for small businesses;
- allowing for undue hardship relief under exceptional circumstances (like the Foot and Mouth epidemic); and
- introducing charges for water and sewerage services.

CAJ will be arguing that it is difficult to respond to many of these issues without looking closely at the implications for equality and targeting social need. While the paper acknowledges these principles, little hard data is provided.

For example, the Review notes that a “capital value system is highly likely to be positive in terms of New TSN as it would tend to reduce the relative burden on people and areas that are less well off,” but it does not provide a TSN evaluation, and tends rather to focus on the bureaucratic obstacles to change. Similarly, revenue would be increased by 20% if all the current reliefs and exemptions were dropped, but the Review does not break down the list to evaluate them on an equality basis. After all, any relief scheme must take into account the increased rate burden

that will be felt by everyone else. In addition to an evaluation of relief categories, it is important to confirm that those receiving benefits still fall into the designated categories.

Regional rates contribute 3.8% to the NI Executive budget (£285m in 1999/2000) and are determined by the Executive and the Assembly; district rates constitute 65% of the District Council budgets (£220m in 1999/2000) and are determined by local councils. The Review estimates that in 2002-03 the average NI household will pay about £445 per year in combined regional and district rates. Businesses on average pay £7,028. Net Annual Values of each property were established for non-domestic properties in 1995 and for domestic properties in 1976. Currently the tax base in NI is regressive, meaning that a smaller percentage of income is taxed as income rises.

Evaluation of the rating policy comes at a time when the NI government is settling into its role as being responsible for the devolved budget and deciding on ways to address the claimed £6 billion infrastructure deficit. Needs and effectiveness studies of departmental budgets are currently being conducted; the Executive is contemplating its policy on private finance initiatives and long-term budget issues; and the May 2 Gordon Brown announcement allows the Executive new borrowing powers. Rates income is the only significant way for the Executive to supplement money allocated to it by the Treasury; it can also be used as a lever for further borrowing.

There is an acknowledgement in the paper of the need for reform if rates are to be efficient and equitable, but it is also likely that rates will be increased beginning with the 2004-05 budget.

CAJ believes that reform should bring in a substantial amount of money, but must be done in a way that promotes equality and TSN objectives. Indeed, this is one area where – given existing data – TSN and equality analyses can be easily and accurately conducted. Equality assessments should not be deferred, but must be undertaken at a stage when they can effectively when they can influence policy choices. We will be arguing that if alternative systems are TSN positive, and the current one is regressive, administrative and transitional obstacles should not impede reform. Hopefully the public will engage actively in the debate in order to ensure a fairer rating system.

Marny Requa

\* [www.nics.gov.uk/ratingpolicy/](http://www.nics.gov.uk/ratingpolicy/) - May 2002, published by the DFP; closing date for consultation September 16, 2002.

## Funding Crisis in Women's Sector

**Essential services and jobs in the women's sector are currently being threatened by a funding crisis that is affecting hundreds of women's groups and projects, according to the Women's Support Network (WSN). The loss of jobs, expertise, and infrastructure will have a devastating impact on the most disadvantaged in society.**

The women's sector has been overly dependent on EU programmes because public bodies have been reluctant to provide the groups mainstream funding. Currently many organisations are waiting to hear if they will receive Peace II or BSP funding in the short-term, but the outlook is not good. Some WSN member groups' funding applications have been rejected and the complex application process limits access to the funds. In addition, Peace II favours projects over corefunding.

WSN argues that in order for the NI Assembly to carry out Targeting Social Need, equality, and citizen participation objectives, adequate resources should be made directly available to community and women's organisations. They are lobbying for short-term emergency funding by the Fund for Social Inclusion and Community Regeneration and a pilot program to establish ongoing support for women's groups from multiple governmental departments.

Local women's groups are diverse – they range from Women's Centres at the heart of geographical communities to need-based organisations that focus on specific issues and infrastructure organisations that create links among groups. As such, they meet a wide range of government policy goals, including Investing for Health, Lifelong Learning, Promoting Social Inclusion, New Targeting Social Need, the NI Childcare Strategy and the Active Communities Initiative. The government should thus take the concerns of the sector into consideration when making public policy and funding decisions, involve the sector in the process, and ensure that public bodies give appropriate support to groups. The government describes "sustainability" as program self-sufficiency; instead, sustainability in the context of the community sector means a group should address social needs, align with agreed upon policies, and be effective. If a project or group is sustainable, it should be mainstreamed into government policy and practice, and attract statutory funding.

Two recent reports highlight the needs of specific groups of women in NI who will be adversely affected by the funding crisis. In *A Mighty Silence*, Marie Quiry, researcher for the Lesbian Advocacy Services Initiative (LASI), reports on a study conducted among lesbian and bisexual women in NI. Harassment, workplace discrimination, and other forms of homophobia were documented by interviews with 160 women; partnership rights and lack of health care and

services for lesbian and bisexual women were also cited as obstacles. Lesbian parents are particularly marginalized in NI society, as are those who are disabled and members of ethnic minorities. Because lesbians are largely invisible in society, it is difficult for them to be represented by public bodies addressing inequalities; the report called for better legal advice for lesbians. The report also proposed the establishment of an organisation to represent lesbian and bisexual women, which LASI is now beginning to form. The group would incorporate public advocacy work and promote services and leadership roles for lesbian and bisexual women – including the formation of new groups and involvement in other community groups.

*Visible Women: Ethnic Minority Women in Northern Ireland*, a conference report put out by the Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM), focuses on issues crucial to another largely overlooked group. Although subject to both race and gender discrimination, the experiences of ethnic minority women often fall outside of the radar of sexual and racial equality agendas. In particular, these women are restricted from education, training, and employment opportunities because of language barriers, discrimination, inadequate information and services, and lack of recognition of overseas qualifications. Because they might not have extended families in the area, they have difficulty finding affordable and multi-cultural childcare, and are often left to deal with racial bullying without sufficient support. There is a general lack of resources and services for ethnic minority women. The report calls for access to legal protection and social services, and increased awareness of the particular issues faced by these women.

The loss of funding will impact not only existing organisations, but also prevent improved services for women whose needs have yet to be addressed by community or women's groups, such as those in the above reports.

### Ways Forward

1. The Harbison Task Force on the Community and Voluntary Sector, scheduled to convene in September 2002, will have a great impact on the relationship between government and the community sector. The Task Force was set up in anticipation of the end of Peace II and other European funding programmes to examine funding trends and the sustainability of the sector and its role in governance.
2. The Assembly Committee for Finance & Personnel is holding public hearings in July regarding the implementation of EU Structural Funds.
3. Organisations can contact the Voluntary Activity Unit of the DSD about local Community Support Plans, which are key to the funding of community organisations at the local level.

**Marny Requa**

## Civil Liberties Diary

**May 1** A retired Canadian judge, Peter Cory has accepted an offer to probe six murders involving allegations of security force collusion. The case involves those of Pat Finucane, Rosemary Nelson, Robert Hamill, Billy Wright, Harry Breen, Bob Buchanan and Lord and Lady Gibson.

**May 2** Mr Tom Constantine, the police Oversight Commissioner delivered his Policing Board report on new policing in N.I. He praised the work of the Police Board members, but found that progress to date on the amalgamation of Special Branch and Crime Branch and the allocation of resources and progress on human rights fell short of recommendations outlined in the Patten report.

**May 7** The campaign to end the controversial 11 plus in NI received a major boost with the decision of the three main Protestant churches to support the abolition of the selection test. The Transfer Representatives Council representing the Church of Ireland, Presbyterian and Methodist churches stated that it was of paramount importance that children should be treated equally, irrespective of their academic achievements.

**May 8** A new government proposals wants a new independent commission, instead of the Law Society, to administer legal aid in NI. The Lord Chancellor's department said the new commission would have a chair and between 6 and 10 members. It would be the means of introducing a modern system of publicly funded legal services for the people of NI.

**May 10** A couple who admitted perverting the course of justice in a case linked to the murder of Portadown Catholic Robert Hamill were sentenced on the eve of the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death. The couple is alleged to have lied to provide an alibi for an RUC reservist whom, it has been claimed, telephoned the suspects to advise them to destroy evidence.

**May 11** A seminar, facilitated by Youth Action NI and the Human Rights Commission was attended in Belfast by more than 40 young men aged between 14 to 25. A spokesperson for the group said its function was to ensure the Human Rights Commission took young men's concerns on board and that issues affecting young men should be included in a Bill of Rights for NI

**May 13** The report of the Police Ombudsman on the death of Lurgan solicitor Rosemary Nelson, which was due to be published this week was delayed after CAJ officials were granted a Judicial Review of three investigations. Taken against Mrs Loan and Sir Ronnie Flanagan, the CAJ's legal action seeks full disclosure of documents relating to death threat against Mrs Nelson.

**May 14** Racist attacks which have forced a Nigerian family from their home in the village area of South Belfast have been condemned by local politicians. Monica McWilliams said the family should be free to live wherever they choose as a basic human right.

**May 16** The Irish government has raised concerns with the British Government over the use of plastic bullets during serious riots in east Belfast. Three rounds were discharged by police and ten by the British army. While the Police Ombudsman has launched an investigation over PSNI use of baton rounds, concerns have been raised that the army does not have a similar scrutinising body to probe claims of misconduct.

**May 23** A conference organised by the Equality Commission and the business-led Opportunity Now organisation heard that women in NI are still earning around 20% less than men, despite equal pay legislation. The conference heard that to achieve equality of pay there must be a focussed working partnership between the Equality

Commission, employers, trade unionists and government.

**May 28** A report by the Police Ombudsman has stated that the police were justified in their use of plastic bullets in riots during the past year, particularly in regards to areas where serious rioting had occurred. However, spokesperson for the United Campaign Against Plastic Bullets, said the pressure group was concerned that the report would be used to defend the continued use of plastic bullets by the security forces.

**May 29** The CAJ has welcomed the finding from the European Court of Human Rights that the United Kingdom had violated the right to life of Derry man Dermot McShane (see page 3). Mr McShane was crushed to death by an Army vehicle during serious rioting in the Bogside in July 1996.

**May 30** Hugh Orde, Deputy Assistant Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police has been appointed as the new Chief Constable for NI. He has been active in the investigation into allegations of security force collusion in to the murder of Pat Finucane.

*Compiled by Peter and Moya Gahan from various newspaper sources.*

## Just News

**Just News** welcomes readers' news, views and comments.

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