

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: EUR 45/022/2004 (Public)
News Service No: 227
16 September 2004

UK: Public inquiry must be held into Finucane killing

Joint Statement from Amnesty International, British Irish Rights Watch, the Committee on the Administration of Justice and Human Rights First

Four leading human rights organizations, who sent observers this week to the trial of Kenneth Barrett, today called urgently on the UK government to immediately implement Judge Peter Cory's recommendation for a public inquiry into the 1989 murder of Belfast lawyer Patrick Finucane.

The conviction and sentencing today of Kenneth Barrett, a former loyalist paramilitary, for the murder of Patrick Finucane has removed any purported justification on the part of the authorities to further delay a public inquiry.

"Our observers of the trial this week were able to confirm that Kenneth Barrett's guilty plea led to no significant information being made public during the court case; criminal proceedings have clearly been insufficient in getting at the full truth of the Finucane case," a spokesman for the four organizations said.

There must be no further delay in immediately proceeding to hold a public inquiry into the allegations of state collusion into, and subsequent cover-up of, Patrick Finucane's killing.

The four organizations who sent observers further noted Judge Cory's finding that: *"[t]his may be one of the rare situations where a public inquiry will be of greater benefit to a community than prosecutions."*

"Successive governments have aided and abetted the cover-up in this most sinister of murders, which involved collusion by several agents and agencies of the state, including the police and the army. The time has come to submit the murder of Patrick Finucane to the independent scrutiny it demands. There is no longer any excuse for prevarication, and we expect the Prime Minister to announce a public inquiry immediately," a spokesman for the four organizations said.

In the past, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on human rights defenders and the UN Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges, as well as international and local human rights organizations, including the International Federation of Human Rights, Human Rights Watch and the Pat Finucane Centre have called on UK government to proceed to an inquiry without delay.

The inquiry should focus on collusion by state agents with loyalist paramilitaries in Patrick Finucane's killing, on reports that his death was the result of state policy, and on allegations that different

government authorities played a part in the subsequent cover-up of collusion in his killing.

Background

Patrick Finucane, an outspoken human rights lawyer, was shot 14 times in his home in Belfast, Northern Ireland in 1989 by loyalist paramilitaries. His was just one among a number of killings alleged to have been carried out with the collusion of UK security forces.

In the aftermath of Patrick Finucane's killing, substantial and credible allegations of state collusion began to emerge almost immediately. Since then, prima facie evidence of criminal conduct by police and military intelligence agents acting in collusion with loyalist paramilitaries in the killing has emerged. In addition, allegations of a subsequent cover-up have pointed to different government agencies and government authorities, including the police, the British Army, MI5 (the UK Security Service, officially "responsible for protecting the UK against threats to national security") and the office of the Director of Public Prosecution in Northern Ireland.

In May 2002, the UK and Irish governments appointed Justice Peter Cory - a former Canadian Supreme Court Judge - to investigate a number of killings in which government security forces were reported to be involved, including the killing of Patrick Finucane.

Justice Cory submitted his reports in October 2003, but it was not until six months later that the UK authorities finally published them, simultaneously announcing the creation of public inquiries into three cases. However, they refused to announce a public inquiry into Patrick Finucane's case despite Justice Cory's unequivocal conclusion that in his case *"only a public inquiry will suffice"*. Instead, the authorities have referred to *"set[ting] out the way ahead at the conclusion of prosecutions"*.

For further information contact:

Amnesty International (James Dyson, General Press Officer, 44 20 7 413 5831)
British Irish Rights Watch (Jane Winter, Director 44 208 7729161)
Committee on the Administration of Justice (Maggie Beirne, Director 44 7703 3486 949 or Maggs O'Conor, Legal Adviser 44 28 90961122)
Human Rights First (Fiona Doherty, Senior Associate 001-212-845-5260)

Public Document

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

For latest human rights news view <http://news.amnesty.org>