

AI INDEX: EUR 45/02/97  
13 FEBRUARY 1997

### **MEDIA ADVISORY**

#### **AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL AND LEADING NON-GOVERNMENTAL HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS CALL FOR NEW INQUIRY INTO "BLOODY SUNDAY"**

In a joint letter signed today with leading non-governmental organizations, Amnesty International calls on the United Kingdom Prime Minister, John Major, to instigate an immediate, wide-ranging and impartial inquiry into the events that took place on "Bloody Sunday" -- 30 January 1972 -- when British Army soldiers opened fire against unarmed demonstrators in Northern Ireland, killing 13 people and wounding 15 others.

The joint letter was signed by British Irish Rights Watch, the Committee on the Administration of Justice, Human Rights Watch, International Federation of Human Rights, the Irish Council for Civil Liberties, the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, Liberty, and the Scottish Council for Civil Liberties.

On 7 February this year, Amnesty International wrote to Sir Patrick Mayhew, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pointing out that striking and significant evidence had recently come to light, showing that the original Tribunal of Inquiry, chaired by Lord Widgery, was fundamentally flawed.

However, the organization said today, "this evidence has always been available to the authorities and was part of the documentation collected, and allegedly ignored, by the Widgery Inquiry."

Amnesty International's letter contains the following main points:

- C Eyewitness evidence, tape-recordings of army radio transmissions, medical evidence and TV coverage have now been made public which show that (contrary to Lord Widgery's findings) it was not only the Parachute Regiment that opened fire. Members of other regiments, including the Royal Anglian Regiment, may have been responsible for some of the shootings and possibly three of the killings.
- C Many of the 700 eyewitness statements reported hearing shots being fired from the Walls, and tape-recordings show soldiers on the Walls claiming responsibility for firing. Dr Raymond McLean, who attended the official post-mortem examinations, found that the trajectory line of bullets in three cases indicated that they were shot from above. Archive film rebroadcast by UTV shows Major General Robert Ford, Commander of Land Forces in Northern Ireland at the time, admitting on the day after the killings that soldiers other than the Parachute Regiment had been firing.

Amnesty International believes that if the Widgery Inquiry had thoroughly investigated all the available evidence, it would have reported on the involvement of other regiments. Furthermore,

- C Papers recently released by the Public Record Office show that soldiers who testified at the Tribunal of Inquiry made statements that differed significantly from their original ones made to the Ministry of Defence a few hours after the incident. The later statements changed details

in such a way as to present the soldiers' actions in a better light. The earlier statements were not made available to Counsel representing the interests of the deceased.

- C An expert analysis by Professor Dermot Walsh of the two sets of statements concluded that: "The nature and extent of these discrepancies are such that they not only render the soldiers evidence unreliable, but they also give grounds for charges of murder or attempted murder against some of the soldiers concerned... The Tribunal's approach to the Army evidence also raises some very profound questions about the legality of its own performance. The very fact that it ignored the fatal flaws in the soldiers' self-serving testimony and preferred it even to conflicting testimony from reliable and independent sources, raises the suspicion that the Tribunal was biased in favour of clearing the Army of any serious wrongdoings."
- C The suspicion that the Tribunal took certain decisions which conveyed the appearance of bias in favour of the Army is reinforced by other documents released by the Public Record Office. The confidential memo of a meeting held between the Prime Minister, the Lord Chancellor and Lord Widgery before he embarked on the inquiry shows that the Prime Minister attempted to influence the approach of the Tribunal, when he reminded Lord Widgery that they were "fighting not only a military war but [also] a propaganda war".
- C Another memo records a statement by Lord Widgery as saying that he "will pile up the case against the deceased, including the forensic coincidence and the willingness of local people to remove guns, but will conclude that he cannot find with certainty that anyone of the 13 was a gunman".

"This apparent reticence to hold an inquiry into all the evidence already available fails to take into account the lasting damage to public confidence in the impartiality of the judiciary and the government that was inflicted by the flawed Widgery Inquiry," Amnesty International said.

"The seriousness of the evidence pointing to a possible cover-up at the highest levels requires an immediate and positive response from the United Kingdom government. A fresh inquiry, conducted openly and impartially, would go a long way towards healing the wounds inflicted by Bloody Sunday."

ENDS\