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United Kingdom: Inquiry into “Bloody Sunday” - a step towards justice

Amnesty International welcomed Prime Minister Tony Blair’s announcement yesterday of the initiation of a "full scale judicial inquiry" into the events of “Bloody Sunday”, when British Army soldiers killed and wounded unarmed people in Northern Ireland 26 years ago.

“Establishing the truth of what happened 26 years ago is the first step in ensuring that justice is done and seen to be done,” Amnesty International said today. “The relatives of the deceased, the surviving victims, the security forces and the public deserve no less.”

Amnesty International applauds the Prime Minister’s recognition that *"where the State’s own authorities are concerned, we must be as sure as we can of the truth..."*.

The organization hopes that the inquiry will establish what led to and culminated in the events of 30 January 1972, when British Army soldiers killed 13 unarmed people and wounded 15 others, including one person who subsequently died. As Mr Blair acknowledged, the families of the victims, the surviving victims and their supporters have been working to see this happen tirelessly and with dignity for 26 years.

Amnesty International is hopeful that the inquiry, which will be conducted by three judges (Law Lord Saville of Newdigate serving as chair and two other members possibly from the Commonwealth), will be fully independent, impartial and thorough, as is required by international human rights standards.

“Justice demands that this time -- unlike 26 years ago -- all evidence will be disclosed to the families of the victims and the surviving victims and that the full report of the inquiry will be made public. Only then may there be a chance of restoring public confidence in the authorities to respect the rule of law,” Amnesty International said.

The organization welcomed the announcement by the Irish Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, of the publication of the Irish Government’s *Assessment of the New Material about Bloody Sunday*. The document reportedly examines the flawed inquiry and findings 1972 Widgery Tribunal in light of new and newly disclosed material as well as evidence that was available 26 years ago.

The organization supports the government’s commitment that it and its agents will cooperate fully with the inquiry. It anticipates that the government’s commitment to ensuring that the inquiry has full powers to "call witnesses and obtain production of documents" extends to all forms of evidence. Amnesty International will monitor the establishment of the inquiry, the powers granted to it, its proceedings and findings.

The organization urges the inquiry to exercise its powers to grant immunity from prosecution in individual cases in a manner that is consistent with the basic principle that there should be no impunity for serious human rights violations.

Amnesty International understand that the families of the victims have requested the government to provide their lawyers with details about the form and functioning of the inquiry. It expects that, in keeping with the spirit of the government's announcement, the answers to these questions will be forthcoming without delay.

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