

AI INDEX: EUR 45/09/96
17 JUNE 1996

UNITED KINGDOM: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CONDEMNS SATURDAY'S IRA BOMBING

Amnesty International strongly condemns the bombing attributed to the Irish Republican Army (IRA) on Saturday morning, 15 June, in Manchester, United Kingdom, which injured more than 200 people, mostly from flying glass.

About ten people remained hospitalized after the first day, including one woman who required 300 stitches on her face during seven hours of surgery.

The bomb exploded in Manchester's city centre when many thousands of people were in the shopping area. According to press reports, the IRA gave coded warnings one hour and 35 minutes before the bomb exploded and the police began evacuating the area one hour and 20 minutes before the bomb exploded. To date, the IRA leadership has not claimed responsibility nor issued a statement.

This action follows a series of other explosions claimed by the IRA since it broke the ceasefire on 9 February 1996, including the bombing in London Docklands which resulted in two deaths and 100 injured civilians, and a "premature explosion" on a London bus on 18 February which resulted in the death of an IRA man and eight injured people.

These indiscriminate attacks on civilians have taken place against a backdrop of other abuses.

"We are appalled by the level of human rights abuses carried out by paramilitary groups based in Northern Ireland, despite the declared cessation of military activities by those groups in the autumn of 1994," Amnesty International said.

"We are particularly concerned about the so-called "punishment" killings and beatings, which are actions taken by paramilitary groups against members of their own communities."

During 1995, according to police figures, six killings were carried out by Republican armed groups and one killing by Loyalist armed groups. Since the beginning of the year there have been more killings:

- * Ian Lyons was shot dead on 1 January by a group which is believed to be linked to the IRA and calling itself Direct Action Against Drugs;
- * Tommy Shepperd was shot dead by Loyalists on 21 March;
- * the killing of Gino Gallagher on 30 January sparked off a feud between two factions within the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA), resulting in four other deaths and others wounded.

During 1995 there were at least 217 so-called “punishment” beatings: 141 by Republican armed groups and 76 by Loyalist armed groups. These beatings have continued unabated this year. On 21 January the Ulster Freedom Fighters, a Loyalist group, beat a man and later apologized claiming mistaken identity. Ervine Fleming was holding his two-year-old daughter when a gang broke into his home and attacked him with hammers and baseball bats in front of his wife and children. He suffered serious head injuries and bruising. On 27 March 18-year-old Martin Doherty was attacked by a group of six or seven Republican men, who drove metal spikes into his knees and arms; he sustained injuries to all four limbs.

In line with international standards, Amnesty International opposes deliberate or indiscriminate attacks on civilians. It urgently reiterates its appeal to all paramilitary organizations to commit themselves to abide fully by fundamental principles of international humanitarian law, and in particular to cease all deliberate or indiscriminate attacks on civilians.

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