

News Service: 059/99  
AI INDEX: EUR 45/16/99  
25 March 1999

**PUBLIC STATEMENT  
NORTHERN IRELAND  
HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS MEET SECRETARY OF STATE**

Human rights organizations united for a second time in a week to meet Northern Ireland Secretary of State, Mo Mowlam, in order to press for independent inquiries into the killings of Rosemary Nelson and Patrick Finucane.

In their meeting with the Secretary of State and Northern Ireland Office officials on 23 March, representatives of Amnesty International, British Irish Rights Watch and the Committee on the Administration of Justice raised the following points:

***\* The urgent need for an independent inquiry by non-Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) officers into the killing of Rosemary Nelson***

The human rights organizations emphasized that the appointment by the Chief Constable of the RUC of the Chief Constable of Kent police and some FBI members was not an adequate response. The Kent police officers have been appointed to supervise the RUC investigation, and the FBI's input is stated to be limited to forensic issues. The organizations consider that these roles do not amount to an independent inquiry with an international dimension. The investigation is still being carried out by RUC officers from the area in which Rosemary Nelson lived and worked. The lack of an independent investigation has already reportedly deterred some witnesses from coming forward with their evidence.

***\* The urgent need for a judicial inquiry into the killing of Patrick Finucane***

The human rights organizations rejected the decision by the RUC Chief Constable to refer the report prepared by British Irish Rights Watch -- which contained new evidence of collusion in the killing of Patrick Finucane -- to a senior English police officer, John Stevens. Deputy Commissioner of the London Metropolitan Police Service, he was involved in two previous investigations into collusion, the results of which were never published.

The organizations pointed out that the report was intended to assist the Secretary of State in assessing the need for a full judicial inquiry into the killing as recommended by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers and many human rights organizations. Another internal police investigation, the results of which would not be made public, is not an adequate response to the report.

***\* The urgent need for an inquiry into allegations of police intimidation and harassment of lawyers***

Human rights organizations join the UN Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers in urging the government to establish an inquiry into the allegations of police intimidation and harassment of lawyers in Northern Ireland. The Special Rapporteur concluded in April 1998 that police officers systematically harassed and intimidated lawyers representing clients from all communities.

The ability of lawyers to work freely and without fear of intimidation is an essential element of the administration of justice and the rule of law. The need for this inquiry is especially urgent after the killing of Rosemary Nelson.

***\* The urgent need to develop mechanisms to provide protection for people under threat, including lawyers, politicians and community activists***

The human rights organizations expressed concern that -- despite being aware of the allegations of threats against them -- the government failed to protect the lives of Patrick Finucane and Rosemary Nelson. In addition, the organizations pointed out that many people -- especially those people who already feel threatened or abused by the RUC -- will not seek protection from the RUC. Thus, there is a need for truly impartial mechanisms to assess protection needs and methods.

A report by the Independent Commission on Police Complaints (ICPC) was disclosed on 24 March. This report detailed the progress made in the investigation of complaints made by Rosemary Nelson against the RUC for harassment, intimidation and death threats. The ICPC had serious concerns about the RUC's initial investigation into the complaints. These concerns included "general hostility, evasiveness and disinterest on the part of the police officers involved in this investigation" as well as the way investigating officers viewed and treated Rosemary Nelson. At the recommendation of the ICPC, the investigation was taken over by a senior officer from the London Metropolitan Police in July 1998. The investigation was completed this month.

The disclosure of the report by the ICPC and the rejection by Paul Nelson, Rosemary Nelson's husband, of RUC involvement in the murder inquiry only serve to confirm the concerns expressed by human rights organizations.

Amnesty International, British Irish Rights Watch and the Committee on the Administration of Justice were disappointed that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland was unable to give a prompt and positive response to the concerns expressed. However, the three organizations hope that yesterday's developments will underline the need to take urgent and decisive action to institute independent inquiries into the killings of Rosemary Nelson and Patrick Finucane -- as well as into allegations of police harassment and intimidation of lawyers in Northern Ireland -- and to ensure the prevention of such deaths in the future.

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