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THE UNITED KINGDOM: KILLING OF DIARMUID O'NEILL RAISES SERIOUS QUESTIONS

Amnesty International is urging the authorities to institute an independent judicial inquiry into this week's killing of Diarmuid O'Neill, with a view to making an early and complete public finding.

"Conflicting police statements raise serious questions about the circumstances in which the shooting took place," Amnesty International said today in a letter to the United Kingdom Government.

"Previous similar incidents have raised critical questions about the potential for such operations to result in allegations of unlawful killings. This makes it all the more important for the government to be seen to be carrying out a truly independent and impartial investigation into this serious incident."

Armed police carried out a raid on a house in west London in the early morning of 23 September, resulting in the death of Diarmuid O'Neill and the arrest of two others. Diarmuid O'Neill was apparently shot six times by two officers from Scotland Yard's tactical firearms group, SO19. Questions have already been raised concerning the circumstances.

Initial statements by the police justified the death of Diarmuid O'Neill by stating that he was killed during a shootout between the police and the arrested suspects. However, subsequent reports apparently have confirmed that Diarmuid O'Neill was unarmed, that the other suspects were also unarmed and that there was no shootout. The reasons for the initial misleading statements to the media and the public should be clarified.

The treatment of Diarmuid O'Neill after the shooting also needs to be investigated. The photos of smeared blood on the front steps of the house would seem to indicate that Diarmuid O'Neill was dragged, seriously wounded, down the steps to the pavement, rather than being treated where he lay or removed on a stretcher. Another issue which requires clarification is the reported use of CS gas during the operation: what was the intent behind the use and what effects would the amount of CS gas used have had on Diarmuid O'Neill's behaviour or mental reasoning?

Amnesty International understands that the police investigation is being carried out by a senior officer of the Metropolitan Police Service, the same police force that was involved in the incident. This would appear to depart from past practice whereby senior officers from external police forces have been brought in to investigate serious allegations about police conduct.

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