

AI INDEX: EUR 45/07/98
1 April 1998

PUBLIC STATEMENT

UNITED KINGDOM

UN Report criticizes emergency law practices in Northern Ireland – action needed now

Amnesty International welcomes the publication of a United Nations (UN) report which is critical of emergency law practices in Northern Ireland.

The report by Param Cumaraswamy, the UN Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, results from his fact-finding mission in October 1997 to investigate allegations that police officers in Northern Ireland routinely intimidated and harassed defence lawyers. Param Cumaraswamy concludes that police officers have engaged in “activities which constitute intimidation, harassment, and hindrance” of lawyers and recommends an inquiry into such practices.

The report also highlights the lack of safeguards for suspects arrested under emergency legislation, including restrictions on access to legal advice, and makes a number of recommendations aimed at ensuring respect for the rule of law and human rights.

Amnesty International joins four other international NGOs: the International Commission of Jurists, Human Rights Watch, the International Federation of Human Rights and the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights in urging the UK Government to implement the Special Rapporteur’s recommendations.

The continued abrogation of basic human rights in Northern Ireland has played a central role in the conflict in Northern Ireland. Previous UK governments have hidden behind secrecy and internal inquiries to avoid being accountable for human rights violations by its agents in Northern Ireland. They have ignored the recommendations of international treaty bodies as well as some of their own internal inquiries. The protection of fundamental human rights has been seen as secondary to the maintenance of a high level of security. The new government has an opportunity to reassert the primacy of the protection of human rights in Northern Ireland.

Given the persistence of human rights violations perpetrated in Northern Ireland, there is a particular need for the government to take action on a number of issues, including policing and emergency law provisions. Amnesty International has issued a report which details some of the measures which require urgent action to increase the protection of human rights in Northern Ireland.

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For further information, please refer to the joint statement with other NGOs:

Leading Groups welcome UN report on intimidation of defence lawyers in Northern Ireland.

Also see Amnesty International’s report: *United Kingdom: UN Report criticizes emergency law practices in Northern Ireland* (AI Index: EUR 45/06/98)