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MEDIA ADVISORY

Human Rights organizations join in Geneva to commemorate Rosemary Nelson

A memorial for Rosemary Nelson was held today in Geneva, Switzerland, during the 55th session of the UN Commission on Human Rights. Rosemary Nelson was killed in a car bomb attack in Northern Ireland on 15 March 1999 by Loyalist paramilitaries.

Mary Robinson, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, addressed the memorial and spoke about Rosemary Nelson as a “courageous lawyer” and human rights defender who continued her work despite threats on her life.

Param Cumaraswamy, the UN Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers raised concerns about the involvement of the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) in the investigation of Rosemary Nelson’s murder.

This mirrored serious concerns expressed recently by the Independent Commission on Police Complaints that the RUC had actively obstructed the investigation into Rosemary Nelson’s complaints of RUC harassment and intimidation. The same concern was echoed in Rosemary Nelson’s husband’s statement read out at the memorial: “I believe that the RUC have demonstrated that they are incapable or unwilling to carry out such an investigation.”

“A genuinely independent investigation means no RUC involvement in supervising or conducting the investigative work on Rosemary Nelson’s case”, said Julia Hall, Counsel for Human Rights Watch.

The memorial event was followed by a briefing sponsored by a coalition of human rights organizations. The organizations reiterated concerns already raised with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on two previous occasions, including an alarming similarity between the dynamics that led to the killing of Rosemary Nelson and that of Belfast solicitor Patrick Finucane in 1989.

“We are here because the family of Patrick Finucane is still waiting, ten years later, for the UK government to establish an independent judicial inquiry into his killing. We do not want to wait ten years for an independent inquiry into the killing of Rosemary Nelson” said a spokesperson for Amnesty International.

The organizations called on the UK government to:

- establish a genuinely independent investigation into the murder of Rosemary Nelson;
- establish an independent judicial inquiry into the 1989 killing of Belfast solicitor Patrick Finucane;

- initiate an independent inquiry into the harassment and intimidation of defence lawyers in Northern Ireland
- establish mechanisms to protect lawyers and other human rights defenders under threat.

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