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MEDIA ADVISORY

Northern Ireland Parades Amnesty International sends monitor

Amnesty International is sending a representative to Northern Ireland to monitor the policing of marches between 2 and 12 July 1999.

This is the third year that the human rights organization has decided to observe some of the marches. In previous years, Amnesty International had been concerned about the apparent disproportionate firing of plastic bullets by police against protesters, and about the dangers of indiscriminate firing at crowds of people with this potentially lethal weapon.

Last summer, Amnesty International was informed of three people who received serious head injuries as a result of plastic bullet rounds. This included one 21-year old woman who lost an eye and one man who is paralysed on his left side after being hit in the forehead. The organization has also been concerned in previous years about the excessive use of force including beating people on the head with batons.

Amnesty International is particularly concerned about this summer's parades in the light of its findings after the visit to Northern Ireland of a four-person delegation in May 1999. The delegation spent several days in Portadown and was appalled about the increased tension after a year of Orange Order protests which have resulted in harassment and intimidation.

The tensions have been heightened because of a number of factors such as the killing of Rosemary Nelson and the sharp increase in loyalist sectarian attacks, including pipe bomb attacks which have led to the death of Elizabeth O'Neill and Frankie O'Reilly.

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For further information, or an interview, please contact Amnesty International's Press Office in London on +44 171 413 5500.