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Amnesty campaign calls for full Finucane inquiry

Thursday, 12 February 2009

An international campaign was launched today to press the Government for a fully independent inquiry into the murder of Northern Ireland solicitor Pat Finucane.

Today marks the 20th anniversary of what remains one of the most controversial killings of the Troubles, with security forces found to have colluded in the lawyer's murder.

The 39-year-old father-of-three was shot dead by loyalists in front of his family at their north Belfast home on February 12, 1989.

Amnesty International has launched a campaign to push for a fully independent probe after Government offered a public inquiry into the case, but insisted it take place under new legislation which critics claim gives ministers undue influence.

"On this day in 1989, Patrick Finucane was shot dead in front of his wife and three children," said Amnesty International UK director Kate Allen.

"Twenty years on, the truth about his killing is still kept from them and from the public.

"With each day that passes, the chances of an inquiry uncovering that truth get smaller.

"Already at least two potentially crucial witnesses have died."

She criticised Government plans to hold a public inquiry under the Inquiries Act 2005, which last year the UN Human Rights Committee criticised for allowing "the Government minister who established an inquiry to control important aspects of that inquiry".

Ms Allen said: "With the Inquiries Act 2005, the UK Government has tried to ensure that any inquiry will lack real independence.

"The UK Government's failure to hold a properly independent inquiry into the killing of Patrick Finucane after 20 years - despite repeated promises to do so - is an outrage."

She added: "The Government has made it clear that it intends to use the Inquiries Act to ensure that part of any inquiry into this case would be held in secret, behind closed doors and in the absence of the Finucane family."

Amnesty has now launched a global online appeal on its UK and international websites urging people to write both to Prime Minister Gordon Brown and Northern Ireland Secretary Shaun Woodward demanding an independent inquiry.

The Finucane family has refused to accept the inquiry offered by Downing Street and demanded a probe free of British Government control.

This weekend the 20th anniversary of Mr Finucane's death will be marked by a major conference at Dublin's Trinity College.

Mr Finucane's widow Geraldine, wounded in the attack which killed her husband, will address the event, as will former UN investigator Param Cumaraswamy and Canadian judge Peter Cory, who each probed the solicitor's murder.

In the immediate aftermath of the killing, allegations of a security force role were made by the Finucane family.

And while the claims were rejected by security forces, disturbing details behind the assassination later emerged.

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Army agent Brian Nelson was found to have planned the killing, while RUC agent Billy Stobie was found to have provided the weapon.

Four years ago loyalist Ken Barrett pleaded guilty to the charge of murdering Mr Finucane. In a documentary he had been secretly filmed claiming police urged loyalists to shoot the solicitor.

Police were found to have failed to act on tip-offs before the crime and did not properly investigate the murder after it happened.

In 2003 former head of the Metropolitan Police Lord (John) Stevens released extracts from his own review of the case and confirmed security force collusion in the killing.

Mr Finucane's clients included high-profile republicans and he began to receive threats after successfully representing IRA suspects.

His family has consistently denied he was an IRA supporter and said he was killed for doing his job.

Lord Stevens, who carried out three inquiries into various allegations of collusion between the security forces and loyalist paramilitaries in Northern Ireland, has confirmed some of his findings.

In 2003 he said his investigations uncovered evidence of "collusion, the wilful failure to keep records, the absence of accountability, the withholding of intelligence and evidence, and the extreme of agents being involved in murder".

The full findings, however, remain secret and have never been made public or shown to the Finucane family or their lawyers.

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Pigs will fly before you'll see the holier-than-thou British government admitting in any way that it, be it through paid agents or the proxies of their paid agents, actually effected the murder of a lawyer who was getting up their noses....I can hear echoes of the "Appaling Vista" argument of the infamous Lord Denning....

Posted by *Nostradamus* | 12.02.09, 19:40 GMT

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westy - for some reason you refuse to acknowledge that your basic position is incorrect: ie Amnesty does not focus on just one case; it supports proper investigations of all such killings, but on this day, the 20th anniversary of the Finucane killing, the natural focus is on this case.

Don't you also think that there is something particularly noteworthy about a case which, the evidence suggests, involves State involvement in the murder of a lawyer? In just about every other democratic country in the world, or in other parts of the UK, it would be seen as a justifiable outrage, inquiries would take place and heads would roll... It is not Celtic v Rangers by proxy, it is about the rule of law.

Posted by *William* | 12.02.09, 14:52 GMT

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Westy, they are not focusing on one case, cant you see that? It's the Belfast Telegraph that is focusing on this case as it is of relevance to Belfast and their readership, thus drawing your attention to it. Wake up and realise that Amnesty is not being divisive. I am now thinking that the division is of your own making.

Posted by Barry | 12.02.09, 14:11 GMT

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My Subscription to Amnesty is now cancelled on principle, I do not agree with their focus on one case, to what I believe is the divisive exclusion of other equally worthy cases.

It is the free choice of Amnesty to support this one cause, and due to their actions, it is my free choice to stop my subscription, and offer it to what I believe to be a more worthy and inclusive charity.

Posted by Westy | 12.02.09, 13:38 GMT

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So 'west' you have supposedly cancelled your subscription to an organisation that helps millions worldwide due to your objection's to one case locally. That, to me is backward and petty. You say "why does Kate Allen and Amnesty feel the need to only support one". They are not just supporting one case. They happen to be making a point of one case while at the same time championing many others at the same time. It's just because the story focuses on this particular case because of it's local relevance. After all it is a Belfast paper. If you have cancelled your subscription (I can only take your word for it) then more fool you. It would say more about you than it would about the organisation of Amnesty. I'm confused as to your motives for renegeing on your agreement to contribute to a charity.

Posted by Barry | 12.02.09, 12:14 GMT

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John - your first line lets down your whole argument;
"Amnesty supports proper investigations and inquiries into all killings in NI" - This is obviously not the case. Amnesty has chosen to support one case.

This is divisive, and creates the impression of a hierarchy of all the innocents murdered under suspicious circumstances.. both Catholic and Protestant.

This is in support of the chosen few, to the detriment of us all.

Posted by westy | 12.02.09, 11:56 GMT

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Amnesty supports proper investigations and inquiries into all killings in NI and elsewhere around the world - evidenced by its response to Eames-Bradley, when it rejected any amnesty/impunity deals for those responsible for every single death in NI, without prejudice to the allegiances of the perpetrators or the victims.

The lack of a proper investigation into the Finucane case and the evidence of state involvement in the killing and cover-up, means that international law demands a proper and public inquiry to expose the truth of any wrong-doing. Indeed, that was the finding of Canadian Judge Cory, who was commissioned by the UK government to make recommendations on this and other such cases. Sadly, the UK government has chosen to ignore those recommendations.

Amnesty is showing courage in staying the course of this campaign for truth and justice. It is the government which is shirking it's responsibilities, not just to the Finucane family, but to us all.

Posted by John | 12.02.09, 11:13 GMT

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There were many suspicious murders of innocent people over the last troubled period - why does Kate Allen and Amnesty feel the need to only support one ?

I feel this is creating unnecessary division and ill feeling, I have been sending a monthly contribution to Amnesty, I have now cancelled this Monthly Standing Order.

Posted by west | 12.02.09, 10:23 GMT

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