



Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission

Northern Ireland: The Patrick Finucane Case

Tuesday, November 19, 2024

11:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

2200 Rayburn House Office Building

As prepared for delivery

Good morning.

I join Co-Chair Smith in welcoming everybody to today's hearing on accountability for crimes committed during the Troubles in Northern Ireland, and specifically, for the murder of Irish barrister Patrick Finucane. I want to thank Co-Chair Smith for his many years of leadership on this and so many other human rights issues regarding what has occurred over the years in Northern Ireland.

I also want to extend a special welcome to the four members of the Finucane family – Geraldine, Michael, Katherine and John – who will speak today about their decades of struggle to ensure justice for Patrick. We are privileged and honored that all of you are able to be here.

Patrick Finucane was a human rights lawyer who represented supporters of a united Ireland who had been accused of terrorism offenses. His clients included high profile members of the Irish Republican Army, and he was extremely effective. That fact earned him the anger and enmity of loyalists and their allies.

On February 12, 1989, a Sunday, he was murdered in cold blood in his home in north Belfast, in front of his wife and his children. He was shot point-blank 14 times. His family has been pursuing justice ever since.

Specifically, for years the Finucane family and human rights organizations in Northern Ireland and around the world have demanded that the government of the United Kingdom convene a full, independent, public inquiry into Patrick's killing.

Why?

Because full accountability requires knowing not only who carried out the killing – a member of the Ulster Defense Association was convicted of the murder in 2004 – but whether and to what extent there was state collusion in Patrick's murder.

Previous official investigations, including the 2012 de Silva report, have suggested that the U.D.A. did collude with state security forces, specifically the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the British army.

Any time there is suspicion of state collusion with a death, a higher degree of scrutiny is required because states have an obligation to protect their citizens – not kill them.

The U.K. is a state party to the European Convention on Human Rights. In response to legal challenges brought by the Finucane family, U.K. and Northern Ireland courts have repeatedly found that the government's failure to conduct an independent public inquiry on Patrick's case was a breach of its obligations under Article 2 of the Convention.

The latest court ruling, issued last July, gave the government a deadline to deliver an investigation of the case that will be compliant with Article 2.

And so finally, last September, the U.K. announced that it will hold a public inquiry. I hope that is positive news, albeit long overdue.

Of course, the devil is in the details. As somebody who is of Irish descent, as somebody who respects a positive relationship with the British government, I sincerely hope that the U.K. government will make sure that the public inquiry is fully independent and empowered to examine all the circumstances leading up to and following Patrick's murder. I think it would be a grave mistake to delay accountability any longer.

National security is not served by states going rogue. National security should never be invoked to cover up human rights crimes.

Let me close by saying how much I admire the Finucane family, and the many human rights organizations in Northern Ireland and beyond that have supported their cause for so many years.

We are living in very difficult times. Instead of protecting human rights, governments of all stripes are trying to roll them back. But in Northern Ireland, those fighting for justice and accountability for the brutal crimes committed during the Troubles have not given up. They are an inspiration to us all.

And let me also recognize the work done by the bipartisan Friends of Ireland Caucus in this House, co-chaired by my colleague from Massachusetts and my dear friend Congressman Richie Neal, as well as Congressman Chris Smith, of which I am a proud member. The Caucus has long engaged in the Finucane case and has regularly called for justice for all the victims of violence during the conflict.

Without objection, I am submitting for the record written testimonies from Brian Dooley of Human Rights First and Andrée Murphy of Relatives for Justice.

Thank you and I yield back.