



February 14, 2022

Rep. James P. McGovern
Co-Chair
Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission

Rep. Christopher H. Smith
Co-Chair
Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission

Re: Amnesty International USA and UK statement for the record for Feb. 15 Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Hearing on “Northern Ireland: Accountability at Risk”

On behalf of Amnesty International and our more than 10 million members, activists, and supporters around the world, we submit the following statement for the record expressing our [concerns](#) regarding the UK government’s plans to deal with the legacy of the Northern Ireland conflict.

On July 14, 2021, the UK government issued a [command paper](#) outlining its plans to legislate for a *de facto* amnesty for grave human rights violations committed during the Northern Ireland conflict. The paper made clear the UK authorities’ intent to end to all “judicial related activity,” including current and future prosecutions, inquests, civil actions, and investigations. The proposals breach the UK’s international and domestic human rights obligations, unduly interfere in the justice system, undermine the rule of law, and dismiss victims’ suffering.

In seeking a *de facto* amnesty, the UK government is putting state forces and other perpetrators of human rights abuses above the law and beyond accountability, obstructing truth recovery and access to justice by removing all legal remedies available to victims. Instead, it proposes a toothless “Legacy Commission” with participation on a voluntary basis.

These plans have been unequivocally rejected by the [Irish government](#), [Northern Ireland political parties](#), [human rights organizations](#), including [Amnesty International](#), victims,

victims' groups, and many others. The UK government is well aware of the lack of support for an amnesty in Northern Ireland. In 2019, a [consultation](#) on Stormont House Agreement mechanisms to deal with the past found that a majority of the Northern Ireland public is opposed to legislating for impunity.

The UK government should work with the Irish government to establish human rights compliant mechanisms to finally deliver the truth, justice, and accountability to which victims are entitled. Instead, they are pursuing a path which represents a unilateral departure from the UK government's existing agreements with the Irish government and Northern Ireland political parties.

Given the long-standing role of the U.S. government in the peace process in Northern Ireland, U.S. officials are uniquely positioned to influence the UK. This role was recognized by 21 U.S. lawmakers in their November 10 [letter](#) to Secretary Blinken. Amnesty echoes their concerns and joins their call for the Biden administration to publicly reject the proposed legacy law.

The U.S. government should:

1. Call on the UK government to abandon their unilateral approach to dealing with the legacy of the "Troubles" and revert to the Stormont House Agreement which, with further work, provides a way forward capable of discharging the UK's human rights obligations.
2. Make public statements opposing the UK authorities' plans and urging them to deal with the past in a victim-centered, rights-respecting manner.
3. Work with the UK and Irish governments to ensure a lasting and human rights-compliant resolution to the conflict in Northern Ireland capable of delivering the truth, justice, and accountability to which victims are entitled.

For more information, please do not hesitate to contact both Daniel Balson and Grainne Teggart on the email addresses provided.

Sincerely,

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