

NORTHERN IRELAND WOMEN'S COALITION

NOTES ON SUBMISSION TO
SUB-COMMITTEE ON CONFIDENCE-BUILDING

11.00am Tuesday 24 March 1998

NIWC welcome the opportunity to discuss security issues, including policing. We recognise that these matters are also being dealt with in the Strand negotiations. In relation to their impact on confidence-building in the communities I would submit the following.

- NIWC are calling for the total demilitarisation of society in Northern Ireland and the establishment of an unarmed police service.
- In relation to the British Government's paper on security issues I must point out that we have never experienced normal policing in N. Ireland, so it is not a question of returning to it, but of establishing it.
- In order to build confidence across all the communities in N. Ireland we need a deescalation of military-style policing and action on structural changes to the RUC.
- In this context we do recognise that there is a current threat to people's lives and that there are still groups who are wedded to a strategy of violence: we want all our citizens protected.
- In order to build confidence we are calling for the repeal of emergency legislation; structural changes in the police force to reflect the cultural, religious and gender composition of the population and its reskilling for civilian/community policing. We also urge that generous packages are offered to serving RUC members in the event of any redundancies and retraining in other fields.
- It has become a truism that the issue of policing is at the heart of the problem in Northern Ireland and that any new political settlement must involve a fresh approach to policing. I would like to make some comments on that fresh approach:
- Any new arrangements in relation to policing must begin with an honest acknowledgement of the problems and the injustices of the past and combine that with a genuine desire to bring about fundamental and far-reaching change.
- Clear guiding principles are essential: any public service organisation ought to have a clear view of its purpose, not least because functions and legal powers ought to be dependant upon that purpose. It ought also to exhibit the characteristics of a democratic organisation.

- The basic functions of a police service are: the prevention of crime; the keeping of the peace; and the protection of the community it serves.
- Any police service ought to uphold the rule of law and observe the human rights and civil liberties of those who live in the jurisdiction. Other hallmarks of a democratic police service are equity, delivery of service, responsiveness, redress and participation. It is clear that the RUC fails to deliver on these standards.
- I would however point out that we recognise that many RUC officers are trying to fulfil an honest policing role in a society in the midst of a violent political conflict.
- A statement of principles is insufficient without a complete overhaul in the legal powers which are given to the police. These emergency powers have conferred arbitrary, wide-ranging and draconian powers to stop, search, arrest and detain on the RUC. We call for the repeal of all emergency legislation. If emergency law remains on the statute books then real change cannot occur.
- The structure of any new police service is one which ought to be governed by its function and by the particular difficulties which are faced in policing a divided society. In order to carry out any of its functions effectively a police service must be representative, accountable and maintain confidence amongst the public. The RUC has failed to inspire confidence and trust in large sections of both communities.
- The RUC is unrepresentative; this will not change unless the culture and ethos of the RUC changes. We need to ask why more Catholics and Nationalists don't join the RUC. We need to create an environment within the police service which is inclusive. A few points on this:
 - Emblems & Oaths: these create an atmosphere of a staunchly unionist organisation. These are contrary to the Fair Employment Code of Practice and a number of judgements in a range of fair employment cases about the need to ensure a "harmonious working environment".
 - Overly military ethos: this discourages not just nationalists but women, ethnic minorities and others. A civilian police service should not have such a military identification.
 - The crunch issue in relation to policing is trust and accountability. There must be real community involvement and consultation in its work and there must be a truly effective and independent complaints system.