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COMMITTEE  
ON THE  
ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE

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*The Northern Ireland Civil Liberties Council*

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The Rt. Hon. John Major, MP  
Prime Minister  
Downing Street  
London SW1

13 February 1997

Dear Prime Minister,

As domestic and international non-governmental organisations, we write this open letter to urge you to set aside the findings of the Widgery Tribunal and to instigate immediately a wide-ranging and impartial inquiry into the events that occurred on Sunday 30 January 1972, known as Bloody Sunday, when thirteen unarmed people were shot dead by British Army soldiers (and one died later of his wounds).

As you will be aware, striking new evidence has recently come to light which shows that the original Tribunal of Inquiry, chaired by Lord Widgery, was fundamentally flawed. In particular, eyewitness evidence, tape recordings of security force radio transmissions, and television coverage have now been made public and show that - contrary to Lord Widgery's findings - it was not only the Parachute Regiment that opened fire on unarmed demonstrators on Bloody Sunday. This evidence strongly suggests that members of other regiments may have been responsible for some of the shootings. We believe that if the Widgery Inquiry had thoroughly investigated all the evidence, it would have had to report on the involvement of other regiments.

Furthermore, papers recently released by the Public Record Office show that soldiers who testified at the Tribunal of Inquiry made statements that were significantly at variance with their original statements to Ministry of Defence police. The earlier statements were not made available to counsel representing the interests of the deceased. Professor Dermot Walsh has produced a report analysing the two sets of statements and has concluded that "The nature and extent of these discrepancies are such that they not only render the soldiers' evidence unreliable, but they also give grounds for charges of murder or attempted murder against some of the soldiers concerned... The Tribunal's approach to the army evidence also raises some very profound questions about the legality of its own performance. The very fact that it ignored the fatal flaws in the soldiers' self-serving testimony and preferred it even to conflicting testimony from reliable and independent sources, raises the suspicion that the Tribunal was biased in favour of clearing the army of any serious wrongdoings."



The suspicion that the Tribunal was biased in favour of the army is reinforced by documents released by the Public Record Office. The confidential memo of a meeting held between the then Prime Minister, the then Lord Chancellor, and Lord Widgery before he embarked on the Inquiry, shows that the Prime Minister attempted to influence the approach of the Tribunal. Other documents reveal the role of a senior civil servant in seeking to have key parts of the report written in a manner sympathetic to the army. They also reveal Lord Widgery's willing complicity in playing down evidence favourable to the deceased and amplifying evidence favourable to the army.

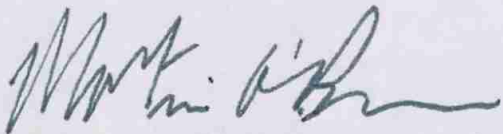
The documents also reveal the total disregard exhibited by the Inquiry for the 700 eyewitness statements, which were collected at the time by the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association and the National Council for Civil Liberties. None of these eyewitnesses were called to give evidence, not even those who had been shot and wounded. Furthermore, Lord Widgery himself read only a handful of those statements.

There is another aspect of the matter which also requires attention. The decision to disclose documents held in the Public Record Office, but previously closed to public scrutiny for 30 to 75 years, is welcome. However, it is apparent that not all relevant documentation has been disclosed. We urge you to order the disclosure of all the documentation, including photographs, forensic records, tape records and films relating to Bloody Sunday, including police, army and intelligence service records. Such records are crucial to establishing the full truth of what happened.

It is widely accepted that the events of Bloody Sunday intensified the conflict in Northern Ireland. Dissatisfaction with the findings of the Widgery Inquiry exacerbated an already tense situation. A fresh inquiry, conducted openly and impartially, would go a long way towards healing the wounds inflicted by Bloody Sunday. While not all of the above evidence is "new", it is clear that it was not fully disclosed to all parties, and that it requires thorough and impartial study which was not the case in the original inquiry. Moreover, precisely because of the unhappy legacy of the original inquiry, we believe that input from international human rights experts would be essential to ensure public confidence in the impartiality of the inquiry. We urge you to respond positively and promptly to the evidence that has emerged, by setting up a new inquiry and making full disclosure in order to remedy this long-standing and grave injustice.

Human rights abuses feed and fuel conflict. The signatories below believe that lasting peace requires the protection and promotion of human rights. Redressing long-standing grievances could make a major contribution to this end.

Yours sincerely,



Martin O'Brien, for and on behalf of -

**Amnesty International, British Irish Rights Watch,  
Committee on the Administration of Justice,  
Federation Internationale des Droits de l'Homme,  
Human Rights Watch, Irish Council for Civil Liberties,  
Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, Liberty,  
Scottish Council for Civil Liberties**