

**THE ASSOCIATION OF THE BAR
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July 26, 2005

Dr. Mitchell Reiss
U.S. Special Envoy for Northern Ireland
United States Department of State
Office of Policy and Planning
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Dr. Reiss:

The Committee on International Human Rights of the Association of the Bar of the City of New York has been monitoring adherence to human rights standards in Northern Ireland for nearly two decades. In 2003, we sent a delegation to Northern Ireland to investigate criminal justice reforms and, in the years since, have published two reports and written numerous letters to United Kingdom government officials regarding the criminal justice reform process, the Inquiries Act 2005, and the Patrick Finucane case, among other issues.

I write today to commend you for calling for a restoration of the devolved institutions in Northern Ireland; your efforts are welcomed and appreciated by our Committee. We respectfully request that you continue in this regard and make every effort to ensure that the devolved government in Northern Ireland is restored in the near future. The United States government maintains a unique relationship with officials in the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland and as such is in a strong position to urge the U.K. government to seek resolution of the current impasse and restore local governance.

We believe that a devolved government is crucial for the promotion of human rights in Northern Ireland -- not only is an active local government vital to participatory democracy, but it bolsters ongoing protections to citizens' rights and can determine appropriate mechanisms for addressing violations of the past. Indeed, locally elected representatives should play a role in discussions regarding the Northern Ireland conflict and the peace process, including issues surrounding reconciliation, transitional justice, and past unsolved murders.

Further, the lack of a devolved government blocks meaningful reform in Northern Ireland. Without an active Northern Ireland Assembly, the British government has less incentive to institute reforms covering a variety of public matters. In the realm of the criminal justice system, for example, numerous reforms have been proposed and

many have been implemented or are in the process of implementation. It would be beneficial to have locally elected representatives encourage and be witness to the implementation of these reforms. In addition, many of the proposed reforms that are vital to an improved system are not possible without the devolution of criminal justice and policing issues, which the British government views as a second step, after the restoration of the Northern Ireland Assembly. It is clear that a Northern Ireland devolved government should have a voice in institutional reform of criminal justice issues and all public matters as it progresses.

We again thank you for your efforts in Northern Ireland, and we urge you to continue the dialogue with the U.K. and Irish governments and to press them to restore the devolved institutions.

Thank you for your time and attention to these matters.

Sincerely,

Martin Flaherty, Chair
Committee on International Human Rights
Association of the Bar of the City of New York