

Press release

Concern Expressed as Counter Terrorism Bill is Debated in Parliament

The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission has voiced serious concern over proposals contained in the Counter Terrorism Bill. The Bill is due for debate today (1 April) at its second reading in the House of Commons. In particular the Commission is extremely disappointed that the Bill proposes to extend the pre-charge detention period to 42 days.

NIHRC Chief Commissioner Prof Monica McWilliams commented:

"It is unfortunate that the government is pressing ahead with these measures despite their very serious implications for human rights protections. At 28 days the UK's existing pre-charge detention period is considerably longer than in countries, such as the USA and Spain.

The Commission strongly believes that there is much to learn from experiences in Northern Ireland. Lengthy detention of persons without charge amounts to a disregard for human rights and may foster resentment amongst the communities whose support is vital in the fight against terrorism.

The Bill also contains a number of measures in relation to Control Orders, which impose conditions restricting the behaviour and movement of terrorist suspects.

Professor McWilliams added:

"The Commission has opposed the system of control orders because of its implications for a range of human rights, including the right to a fair trial and to freedom of expression. It therefore opposes the attempts in this Bill to further cement the Control Order regime".

As the Bill progresses through Parliament, the Commission will continue to press government to ensure its compliance with international human rights standards.

Ends

Further information

For further information, please contact Claire Martin, Press and Public Affairs Worker on (028) 9024 3987 (office), 07786 338290 (mobile).

Notes to editors

1. The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission was established in 1999, by the Northern Ireland Act 1998, to protect and promote the human rights of everyone in Northern Ireland. The powers and functions of the Commission include reviewing law and practice, advising the government, promoting an awareness of human rights and taking cases to court.
2. Following a consultation exercise issued by the Home Office on a future Counter Terrorism Bill in July 2007, the Commission raised serious concerns about the proposals being put forward in its [response](#).
3. The full range of the Commission's concerns can be found in its briefing to Parliamentarians on the Counter Terrorism Bill. The briefing can be accessed at this [link](#).