

# War on Terror: lessons from Northern Ireland

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**CAJ report, 120 pages, January 2008**

The Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ), cross community human rights group based in Belfast, was the local host for a visit to Northern Ireland by the internationally respected Eminent Jurists Panel ([www.ejp.icj.org](http://www.ejp.icj.org)) in 2006. CAJ is now publishing a 120 page report (and a 12 page executive summary), bringing together much of the oral and written testimony submitted to the Panel at the time.

CAJ argues in the report that it is important to look at Northern Ireland to examine what lessons might be relevant to discussions about responses in the current “war on terror”. Northern Ireland is a small geographic region, has a population of only 1.6 million, but it lost 3,600+ people in the conflict. That is equivalent in per capita terms to the loss in the USA of five Twin Towers for each of the past 30 years. There are few jurisdictions in the world that have experienced emergency legislation and the operation of counter-terrorism measures for such a prolonged period of time as Northern Ireland - reaching back to at least 1921. In addition, few other places have experienced the intensity of conflict over such a long period – 30+ years - until the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement (1998). Yet, despite this terrible legacy, Northern Ireland is now coming out of violent conflict and has placed human rights and equality considerations at the heart of its peace building project. Accordingly, the jurisdiction has many lessons – good and bad – to share more generally in the current global debate about what constitutes an appropriate response to political violence.

The report argues that the following lessons can be usefully shared:

- ❖ **Human rights abuses fuel conflict.**
- ❖ **The integration of human rights measures into legislation, policy and institutional practice is essential.**
- ❖ **Protection of due process is vital to the security and stability of society.**
- ❖ **Equality and non-discrimination practices are crucial to security and strong community relations.**
- ❖ **Domestic efforts to protect human rights in times of crisis need to be backed by international measures.**
- ❖ **Special or emergency legislation can easily lead to serious human rights abuses and be counter-productive.**
- ❖ **Token democratic and legal safeguards are not enough to keep in check a state with extraordinary powers.**
- ❖ **The tragedies of the past must be confronted to ensure lasting peace and stability.**

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