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- [Home](#)
- [About Us](#)
- [How to Complain](#)
- [Press](#)
- [Publications](#)
- [Vacancies](#)
- [Legislation](#)
- [Statistics](#)
- [FAQs](#)
- [Links](#)

Currently Visiting » [Police Ombudsman Home](#) » [Press](#) » [2007](#) » [GOVERNMENT SHOULD ENSURE ..](#)

Font Size [A](#) [A](#) [A](#)

GOVERNMENT SHOULD ENSURE FUNDS ARE AVAILABLE: POLICE OMBUDSMAN

Wednesday, 18 July 2007

The Police Ombudsman, Mrs Nuala O'Loan has called on the government to ensure her Office has the funds it needs to carry out her statutory duty of investigating murders from the past which have been referred to it by the PSNI.

Mrs O'Loan comments come in her Office's latest Annual Report, which has just been published.

In the Report, Mrs O'Loan said that while the Government provided a budget for the PSNI, the Public Prosecution Service and the Forensic Science Service to look at all deaths of 'The Troubles', no funding was allocated initially for her Office to do this work.

Mrs O'Loan said she has to negotiate each year for the necessary funds and, at present, no money has been made available for next year:

"The Historical Enquiries Team has notified me of more than 40 further cases which it needs to transfer to my Office and the details are to be found in my Annual Report.

"While I accept that in the future society may choose to develop alternative methods of dealing with the past, at the moment I am required by law to investigate these cases, yet I have not been assured I will have the money to do so.

"We have a situation where the police can investigate all the other murders of The Troubles but, unless my Office is resourced properly, there will be no investigation of allegations of police involvement in murder," she said.

The Police Ombudsman has also expressed grave concerns about the transfer in October of this year of primacy in national security matters from the PSNI to MI5. Mrs O'Loan said that while she has a legal right of access to all material held within PSNI, she would not have such a right when MI5 take charge:

"To date MI5 have not refused me access to any material I asked of them, and this has been enormously helpful, but from October I will not have a legal right to material they hold relating to the work of police officers.

"The Criminal Cases Review Commission has a statutory right of access to MI5 files in the exercising of their duty and I do not understand why my Office cannot be granted a similar duty," she said.

The Annual Report has revealed that the Office received 3249 complaints against police during the year and dealt with an additional 1060 associated matters.

Figures indicate that of the people who made complaints to the Office, 43% indicated that they were Protestant, 39% that they were Catholic and 18% that they were of no religion.

The Police Ombudsman's Annual Report is available on its website: www.policeombudsman.org or from its premises in Belfast.



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[English](#)

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[Mandarin](#)

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[Polski](#)

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[Russian](#)

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- [Home](#)
- [About Us](#)
- [How to Complain](#)
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- [Statistics](#)
- [FAQs](#)
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