

H.RES. 128 • APRIL 20, 1999

**CONDEMNING THE MURDER OF NORTHERN
IRELAND HUMAN RIGHTS ATTORNEY ROSEMARY
NELSON**

Prime Sponsor: Mr. Christopher H. Smith (NJ)

H.Res. 128 – Agreed to by the House on April 20, 1999

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In the House of Representatives, U.S.,

April 20, 1999.

Whereas on September 29, 1998, Rosemary Nelson, a prominent defense attorney in Northern Ireland, who testified before the Subcommittee on International Operations and Human Rights of the Committee on International Relations of the House of Representatives, stated that she had been harassed and intimidated by the Northern Ireland police force, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) in her capacity as a defense attorney, and that she had been “physically assaulted by a number of RUC officers” and that the difficulties with the RUC included “at their most serious, making threats against my personal safety including death threats”;

Whereas Param Cumarswamy, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, also testified before the Subcommittee on International Operations and Human Rights citing the grave dangers faced by defense attorneys in Northern Ireland and stated that “there have been harassment and intimidation of defense lawyers by RUC officers” and that “these harassments and intimidation were consistent and systematic”;

Whereas the United Nations Special Rapporteur recommended that authorities other than the RUC conduct “an independent and impartial investigation of all threats

to legal counsel in Northern Ireland” and “where there is a threat to physical integrity of a solicitor” the “Government should provide necessary protection”;

Whereas Northern Ireland’s Independent Commission for Police Complaints (ICPC) reported “serious concerns” about the RUC’s handling of the inquiry into the death threats Rosemary Nelson received and described the RUC officers investigating the death threats as “hostile, evasive and disinterested” and also noted an “ill-disguised hostility to Mrs. Nelson on the part of some police officers”;

Whereas the government, which provided protection for Northern Ireland judges after paramilitary violence resulted in the death of four judges and some family members, should also provide appropriate protection for defense attorneys;

Whereas despite the threats and the intimidation, Rosemary Nelson courageously continued to represent the rights of Catholic clients in high profile cases, including the residents of Garvaghy road in their bid to stop controversial marches in their neighborhood and the family of Robert Hamill who was beaten to death by a sectarian mob in 1997;

Whereas, because of her human rights work, Northern Ireland solicitor Rosemary Nelson, the mother of three young children, suffered the ultimate harassment and intimidation and was brutally murdered on March 15th, 1999, by a bomb placed on her car;

Whereas all those involved in the targeting and killing of defense attorney Rosemary Nelson, including the Red Hand Defenders, a militant loyalist paramilitary group that is

opposed to the peace process and that has claimed responsibility for the murder, must be brought to justice;

Whereas the success of the peace process is predicated on the ability of the people of Northern Ireland to believe that injustices such as the murder of Rosemary Nelson will be investigated thoroughly, fairly, and transparently;

Whereas the murder of Rosemary Nelson is reminiscent of the 1989 murder of human rights attorney Patrick Finucane, who, according to the United Nations report, had also received numerous death threats from RUC officers;

Whereas the United Nations Special Rapporteur reported that since the Patrick Finucane murder, further information that seriously calls into question whether there was official collusion has come to light; and

Whereas Rosemary Nelson's stated fear of the RUC, the recent release of Northern Ireland's Independent Commission for Police Complaints (ICPC) report, and the United Nations report, all necessitate the establishment of an independent inquiry into Rosemary Nelson's murder in order to foster confidence and credibility in this investigation as well as the peace process: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the House of Representatives—

(1) recognizes the historic significance of the 1998 Good Friday Peace Accords and commends the people of Northern Ireland for their commitment to work together in peace;

(2) condemns all violence committed in violation of the Northern Ireland cease-fire agreement, an agreement that has been largely successful; and

(3) calls on the Government of the United Kingdom—

(A) to launch an independent public inquiry for the investigation of the murder of defense attorney Rosemary Nelson so that evidence gathering, witness interviews, and the issuance of a detailed, public report can be based on the work of law enforcement experts not connected to or reliant upon the efforts of the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC);

(B) to institute an independent judicial inquiry into allegations that defense attorneys are systematically harassed and intimidated by security forces; and

(C) to implement the United Nations Special Rapporteur's recommendation for an independent inquiry into the possibility of collusion in the killing of defense attorney Patrick Finucane.

Attest:

Clerk.