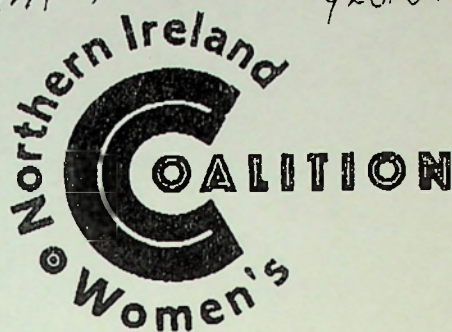


Ann - FY Barbara + I sent yesterday
Robin



A NEW VOICE FOR NEW TIMES

PRESS STATEMENT: September 6, 1998
NO EMBARGO

Women's Coalition seriously concerned about new Emergency Legislation

A meeting of 70 Women's Coalition members, held in Belfast on Saturday, discussed a range of concerns regarding the British government's new Terrorism and Conspiracy Bill, and the Irish Government's Offences Against the State (Amendment) Bill.

The clear consensus among the membership is that both pieces of legislation have potentially serious human rights implications, and are liable to become counterproductive as regards their stated intent.

The Women's Coalition is particularly concerned that this rushed piece of legislation directly contravenes the Belfast Agreement. The Agreement not only recognises the importance of ensuring that policing and criminal justice arrangements are based "on principles of protection of human rights" and should be capable of winning support from "the entire community." It also commits the two governments to review emergency legislation with a view to repealing it

The Women's Coalition urged that, until this legislation is repealed, specific safeguards be put in place, and that these be enacted immediately. Access to legal counsel should not be withheld during interrogation. The audio- and visual recording of all interrogation should be introduced forthwith. These measures are in the interests of the police and criminal justice system as much as defendants, and would help to protect against actual, potential or claimed miscarriages of justice

The Women's Coalition is further concerned about the potential negative impact of the bill on foreign nationals in the UK. Britain has long prided itself on giving sanctuary to political refugees. The bill leaves the government susceptible to pressure from foreign governments, who may demand that action be taken against their political opponents. The fact that the definition of such terrorists rests with Government leaves such people at risk of being traded off against the government's need to maintain trade relations with other nations.

The Women's Coalition was founded on three core principles: Equality, Inclusion and Respect for Human Rights. These inform our opposition to the two governments' hasty and ill-considered enactment of this legislation. The Women's Coalition will continue to work for a culture of respect for human rights. This is one of the best safeguards for the success of the Belfast Agreement and the development of a stable political future.

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