

From the signing of the Good Friday Agreement to a possible Truth Commission for Northern Ireland

Seminar chaired by Professor Brice Dickson, 21st February 2012

Abstract of Keara Powell's presentation

I will be exploring the debate of the creation of a NI truth commission through the development of the 'right to truth' in national, regional and international human rights law. While touching briefly on the progression of this right in NI, I will largely be examining the possibility of a future truth commission through a comparative analysis between NI and the attainment of the right to truth as achieved by truth commissions conducted in various Latin American countries. Putting forward the idea that the structure of these bodies, as well as the reforms that they managed to generate, hold significant lessons for the truth recovery debate in NI, I will conclude by examining how a structure for a NI truth commission could thus potentially be developed, drawing from the foundations provided by the proposed Legacy Commission as advanced by the Eames/Bradley Report (Consultative Group on the Past).

Biography

Keara Powell received a Distinction in her LLM in Human Rights Law from Queen's University last year, with her dissertation entitled: "The Right to Truth-Developing a Truth Commission for Northern Ireland: lessons from the conflict and experiences of Latin America truth commissions." Having previously completed a Law and Spanish degree at Queen's in 2010, Keara also worked for the Human Rights Consortium as an intern during her Master's degree. She is currently employed as a legal assistant with a leading international law firm in Belfast.

Abstract of Mairead Collins's presentation

My paper will consider the issue of moral acknowledgment as part of a truth commission process. Any truth commission deals with the narratives of perpetrators and victims, a dichotomy of often overlapping characters. I will address the moral inequality of this relationship, that is, how the victim's moral self is eroded, how their status as moral beings is diminished by the perpetrator's violent actions. I will argue that moral acknowledgment, acknowledgment that what was done was wrong, offers an avenue of possibility to address this imbalance. I will address what is involved in a statement of moral acknowledgment and consider whether any real statements of moral acknowledgment have been given thus far with regard to the Northern Ireland conflict.

Biog.

Máiréad Collins is the policy and research assistant with the Northern Ireland Human Rights Consortium. She received her PhD in politics from Queen's University, Belfast with a thesis on acknowledgment of moral responsibility in post-conflict transitional justice. She blogs on human rights issues for rightsni.org and Amnesty International.