

Press Release

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Do not blame the Council of Europe for the criminal records backlog

Strasbourg, 11.01.2007 - A statement by Terry Davis, Secretary General of the Council of Europe, in response to criticisms of the 1959 Council of Europe Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters in relation to the reported backlog of 27 000 files on British citizens convicted abroad.

"I am surprised by John Reid's attempt to blame the 1959 Council of Europe Convention for the backlog of unrecorded crimes committed by British citizens abroad. It is clear that the origins of the problem are in London, not Strasbourg. If anything, the fact the authorities in the United Kingdom have received 27 000 files from other European countries, including non-EU countries, shows that the Convention is working. The question is why these files were not properly processed by the Home Office. If the information in some of these files is not complete or adequate, the United Kingdom officials could have used the Convention to ask for the gaps to be filled.

It is also difficult to accept any criticism from John Reid in view of the fact that the United Kingdom has failed to ratify the 2001 Protocol to the Convention which tightened up the procedures agreed in 1959.

Finally, I fail to see how an EU decision can fix the problem. Any EU measure only applies to 27 countries, compared to 46 members of the Council of Europe. Unless the Home Office is not interested in crimes committed by British citizens in countries which are not members of the European Union, I would recommend the Government to sign and ratify all existing arrangements in the Council of Europe and then discuss with the other 45 European countries how these arrangements can be improved."

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