

Press Release

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PACE Human Rights Prize to be awarded to British Irish Rights Watch for 'outstanding' action to defend human rights

Strasbourg, 13.03.2009 – British Irish Rights Watch has been selected as the winner of the first ever Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) Human Rights Prize, which honours "outstanding civil society action in the defence of human rights in Europe".

The independent non-governmental organisation – which has been monitoring the human rights dimension of the conflict in Northern Ireland, and latterly the peace process, since 1990 – was unanimously selected from among fourteen individuals and NGOs nominated for the prize by a distinguished panel including leading figures from the world of human rights.¹

The decision was taken by the Bureau of the Parliamentary Assembly, which brings together parliamentarians from all 47 Council of Europe member states.²

Announcing this decision to the Assembly's Standing Committee today in Paris, PACE President Lluís Maria de Puig said: "At a critical time for the peace process in Northern Ireland, this award sends a clear signal that those who wish to return to violence will not prevail."

The panel praised the organisation's "courageous and outstanding work in monitoring and bringing to light human rights abuses, and its fight against impunity in Northern Ireland". It also commended the NGO's "vigilance" in ensuring that measures taken to combat terrorism were in conformity with international human rights standards.

British Irish Rights Watch – which takes no position on the eventual constitutional outcome of the conflict and works with all sides of the community – researches alleged human rights violations, provides consultancy services to lawyers, organises expert testimony and sends independent observers to trials, inquests and inquiries. Much of its work is carried out by volunteers.

The prize – consisting of 10,000 euros, a medal and a diploma – will be awarded at a ceremony in Strasbourg on the occasion of a special debate on "the state of human rights in Europe" during the Assembly's summer plenary session (22-26 June 2009), alongside the Council of Europe's 60th Anniversary celebrations.

[British Irish Rights Watch website](#)
[Human Rights Prize website](#)

¹. Lluís Maria de Puig, President of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly; Herta Däubler-Gmelin, Chairperson of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights; Serhiy Holovaty, Chairperson of the Monitoring Committee; Irene Khan, Secretary General of Amnesty International; Pieter van Dijk, member of the Netherlands Council of State and former judge at the European Court of Human Rights; Marek Nowicki, human rights lawyer and former International Ombudsperson in Kosovo; Ruth-Gaby Vermot-Mangold, President of the Association "Peace Women Across the Globe" and former member of the Swiss Parliament and the Parliamentary Assembly.

². The Bureau's decision on the prizewinner is subject to the endorsement of the Parliamentary Assembly by means of the Bureau's progress report.

The Parliamentary Assembly brings together 318 members from the national parliaments of the 47 member states.

President: Lluís Maria de Puig (Spain, SOC) – Secretary General of the Assembly: Mateo Sorinas.

Political groups: EPP/CD (Group of the European People's Party); SOC (Socialist Group); EDG (European Democrat Group); ALDE (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe); UEL (Group of the Unified European Left).

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