



NORTHERN
IRELAND
HUMAN
RIGHTS
COMMISSION

IDENTITY CARDS AND SUSPECT COMMUNITIES

Roundtable Seminar

Wednesday 15 October 2008

Malone House, Belfast

10.00am – 2.00pm (with lunch)

This roundtable seminar will focus on the issues arising from 'Identity Cards and Suspect Communities'. It will be chaired by Professor Monica McWilliams, Chief Commissioner of the NIHRC and will feature a presentation of a key briefing paper by Daniel Holder, Policy Worker, NIHRC, entitled *More Than Just a Card – Intrusion, Exclusion and Suspect Communities: Implications in Northern Ireland of the British National Identity Scheme*. Invited speakers will cover related issues of the experiences of suspect communities and racial profiling. There will be opportunity for discussion and questions.

Background: The National Identity Register

There has been a high profile debate around the implications of the introduction of identity cards in recent years. The biometric cards themselves are merely a pointer to the National Identity Register, a vast informational database. Human rights concerns have been raised around the unduly intrusive nature of the system as well as the potential for increasing exclusion and discrimination.

Limited work has been undertaken in examining the particular problems the scheme creates in relation to Northern Ireland. This is, therefore, the focus of the Commission's briefing paper. The broad theoretical concerns raised by the paper will be linked to

existing experiences in the UK, Ireland and across Europe through expert inputs from three external speakers on the interlinking subjects of practices, experiences and impact of racial profiling, and the development of 'suspect communities'.

The Government is now implementing in stages a wide-ranging National Identity Register (NIR), introduced through the Identity Cards Act 2006 and sections of the UK Borders Act 2007.

The Human Rights Commission opposes the current NIR identity card scheme and wants to see it withdrawn. The Commission feels the scheme unduly infringes on the right to privacy and while privacy is not an absolute right, the Commission feels the range of justifications set out for the scheme do not stand up to scrutiny, will be counter productive and/or are disproportionate. It is the Commission's view that the impacts of the NIR scheme will be discriminatory for Irish citizens in Northern Ireland and minority ethnic groups, in particular Muslims and migrants. There would also be a specific impact on British citizens where compulsion to register through passport renewal would impact on freedom of movement.

The decision as to whether NIR identity cards should be made compulsory for Northern Ireland public services is yet to be taken by the devolved institutions.

Invited speakers

Arun Kundnani, Institute of Race Relations and author of *The End of Tolerance: Racism in 21st century Britain*

Arun is the author of *The End of Tolerance: Racism in 21st Century Britain* (Pluto Press, 2007) and the editor of the journal *Race & Class*, published by the Institute of Race Relations, London.

Bernadette McAliskey, Coordinator South Tyrone Empowerment Programme (STEP)

Bernadette is the Coordinator of the South Tyrone Empowerment Programme (STEP). Since her time as an MP, she has devoted herself to the building of successful community infrastructure in her local area of South Tyrone.

Rebekah Delsol, Project Officer, Ethnic Profiling in Europe Open Society Justice Initiative

Rebekah is the project officer on the Ethnic Profiling in Europe project at the Open Society Justice Initiative an operational programme of the Open Society Institute, London. Her work includes research for a handbook in combating ethnic profiling.