

# Briefing to United States House Foreign Relations Committee

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Thank the Representatives; Chair Keating/ranking member/s Fitzpatrick/House Foreign Relations Staff/ and AOH for their support in making this briefing possible.

- Access to the rule of law is a fundamental tenant of any democracy – not least one emerging from violent conflict where rights, safeguards and protections had been deliberately denied; but which, since 1998, have underpinned our peace agreement.
- The GFA - page 1 states – “ ...we dedicate ourselves to the ... protection and vindication of rights for all...”
- Rights, equality, and justice, protections against future violations, are the very spine of the GFA.
- These safeguards are now gone with this Bill.
- This Bill drives a horse and carriage through those rights. When examined in detail it is essentially a blanket amnesty, mendaciously framed as reconciliation.
- This Bill is the very opposite of reconciliation. Such deliberate framing makes it all the more sinister with its menacing objective, which is to deny fundamental rights to justice for victims of egregious violations, and principally to shield – to protect from scrutiny and investigation - UK State forces and their agents within illegal paramilitaries, responsible for well over 1,000 murders. It is this very objective that frames this Bill front and center.
- Understanding this motivation helps to understand what is precisely at stake and why the UK has written the play book to their advantage, regardless of the consequences.
- This Bill will shut down access to justice – it will close down the role of the Police Ombudsman, a key and independent statutory body, established under the GFA. It will shut down inquests. It will prevent investigations into unsolved murders, of which there are approximately 1,400. It will ban all future civil actions.
- This Bill is anti-rule of law – anti-victim – and very much pro-perpetrator.
- This Bill will provide impunity for all crimes regardless of the perpetrators as part of the core objective previously outlined.
- The GFA provided victims with agency to use the law and exercise their right to justice through the courts.

- For the best part of two decades the UK have sought to frustrate legal processes established under the GFA , to obfuscate, to use varying tactics to deny culpability, then delay proceedings preventing truth, justice, and accountability for victims.
- However, and despite these tactics families have remained dignified, steadfast and resilient – determined to take agency, uncover the truth, and right wrongs.
- In recent years inquests have set the historical record straight; finding in many instances that killings by the UK were unjustified and unjustifiable; Police Ombudsman’s reports have found evidence of systemic collusion between the UK and illegal paramilitaries in hundreds of attacks and scores of murders; and in civil cases courts have demanded the provision of evidence only to be fobbed off.
- This Bill is calculated in respect to the above and the thousands of relatives now coming forward seeking justice and the impact this will have for the UK given their role in the conflict.
- There is no other context to this Bill despite attempts at dressing up.
- Thousands of victims from across the community, impacted by all sides, stand together in their opposition to this Bill of shame. They know full well from experience that claims by this current UK govt. that this Bill “*is in their best interests*” are simply a lie. This Bill is self-serving and in the interests of the UK only.
- To qualify for immunity/amnesty a perpetrator will simply provide ‘*to the best of their knowledge*’ their account of an incident/s.
- This fits precisely the: “*I cannot recall*” “*I cannot remember*” mantra of perpetrators. Essentially, they just have to turn up to avail of amnesty.
- There is absolutely no test whatsoever of the perpetrators account – no investigation – no role for the family of those bereaved or for anyone injured – indeed victims will more than likely not know if a perpetrator has even been granted immunity/amnesty.
- This Bill will grant immunity/amnesty for all murders, bombings, attacks, torture and abuse – including codified rights under international law.
- The powers in this Bill permit a British Secretary to stop any existing proceeding (inquest/civil case regardless of the stage at which they have advanced).
- This Bill is retraumatizing victims – it’s adding to the transgenerational traumatic impact.
- It will only deepen old hurts and wounds - not heal them.
- It will only prolong the unresolved past and determine another generation to solve it.
- And the UK knows full well that this Bill will be challenged in the courts over the coming years and unfortunately that is time aging relatives do not have – and this is cruel and inhumane. It’s about running down the clock.

- In March 2020 Relatives for Justice were working with 312 mothers who had children killed - today 82 survive. This Bill tells them they will never see truth and justice for the murders of their children.
- Apart from being illegal and morally repugnant, this Bill is drenched in pain, hurt, anguish, and trauma.
- The former UK Ambassador to the US, Kim Darroch, said of this current UK govt, *"...they break international agreements – international law - do not keep their word - and cannot be trusted..."*
- This Bill undermines the GFA/ECHR/HRA – this current UK administration cares little for the GFA, exemplified not only in this Bill but more broadly in its overall English xenophobic approach to politics.
- Amnesties are normally only reserved as an incentive to end seemingly intractable conflicts where large numbers of lives are being lost.
- To introduce an amnesty 25 years after a peace accord that guarantees and safeguards rights, is unconscionable.
- We need US intervention to protect the GFA and to obtain truth and accountability for all victims of the conflict in Ireland.