



Dear Friends of RSI

We are pleased to be writing to let you know about our new investigative report on breaches of human rights in the policing of protests in Northern Ireland (NI). In our report *Twenty-eight days and £10 million: Rights-violating restrictions on protests in Northern Ireland*, we bring new facts from dozens of freedom-of-information requests and interviews. Thanks to our research team, we've now got the numbers: for example, people in Northern Ireland must provide 28 days' notice of a planned march, compared with only 6 days in England and Wales. Some local authorities require protesters to buy a whopping £10 million worth of insurance cover before they can hold their rally. There were 57 complaints to the Police Ombudsman about the policing of protests between 2022 and 2025. And many local authorities have either wildly excessive restrictions or no policy at all regarding protests on public lands in NI.

We conclude that the policing of protests in NI systematically breaches the European Convention on Human Rights, particularly the Article 11 right to freedom of assembly. We believe that these breaches are so serious and systemic that would-be protesters could and should challenge them in court, in order to restore respect for rights.

Where are these problems coming from? In the main, we found that regulations and policing treat virtually every protest group as if it were planning to hold sectarian marches tied to Protestant/unionist/loyalist or Catholic/nationalist/republican identities, when this is not the case. The authorities are misapplying laws and policies inherited from the 'Troubles' to marches about environmental issues, women's rights, reproductive rights and racial justice – resulting in repression. Of course, there are also broader problems with the repression of protests throughout the UK under national governments that are increasingly hostile to civic action.

This excessive 'security'-focused treatment of the right to protest, as if all protesters presented a serious threat of public disorder or violence, has a discouraging or 'chilling' effect on protests in NI. Our research suggests that people in the region are avoiding staging peaceful protests that they would have had a human right to hold. Protests, of course, are a crucial way for people to express dissent and push for change in a democracy.

As well as setting out a number of specific recommendations for the UK government and local authorities of Northern Ireland to fix the situation in NI, our report also calls on human rights experts, such as the top UN expert on the right to freedom of assembly, to raise these issues with the UK government.

Yours sincerely

Sarah St Vincent
Executive Director



If you would like to unsubscribe, please [click here](#).

DELIVERED USING



Sender