Amnesty International

Opening remarks to

Joint Committee on Justice, Home Affairs and Migration

on

General Scheme of the Legacy of the Troubles Bill 2026.

September 2026

Good afternoon, I am Fiona Crowley, Director of Law and Policy in Amnesty International Ireland, and am joining today as this issue is of substantive importance across the island of Ireland, and to our global movement.

We thank the Cathaoirleach and Committee for the opportunity to address you today at this important and timely juncture.

I now hand over to my colleague Gráinne Teggart, Amnesty International UK's Deputy Director in Northern Ireland to make our opening remarks.

Amnesty International is extensively engaged in work to ensure a human rights compliant approach to dealing with the past. This includes at Westminster with current focus on the UK Government's Troubles Bill awaiting committee stage on 19th and 20th October 2026. In addition, engagement with relevant committees and mandate holders in the UN and Council of Europe human rights mechanisms. Amnesty International UK was also an intervenor and respondent in the *Dillon and Ors* litigation challenging the UK Government's 2023 Legacy Act.

For decades we have been particularly concerned with the question of 'truth recovery' in Northern Ireland as an essential element of the duty to investigate human rights abuses, of a victim's right to remedy, including reparation, and in combating impunity.

Full transparency, genuine accountability and the right to truth have for too long been denied to victims of the Troubles. Decades on, during which time victims (and the community) have suffered and continued to suffer the denial of the right to know the circumstances of the deaths of loved ones and a pattern of gross human rights violations during the conflict, there must be no further failures on legacy.

Amnesty supports the stated goals of the Joint Framework which centrally include ensuring human rights compliance, securing the individual and collective right of victims, families, survivors and wider society to truth, accountability and justice.

However, there are several areas of concern in the General Scheme, which is to give effect to the goals of the Joint Framework.

Our concerns include:

- Duty to veto request for assistance - Head 6 - these are the broadly framed duties to veto requests for assistance and also to veto disclosure of ICIR reports and information provided to the ICIR which we consider give rise to unacceptable risks of incompatibility with Article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and the individual and collective right to the truth that it protects.
- Taking evidence in private - Head 11 - provides for evidence to be taken in private with a discretion to enable evidence to be taken in the presence of listed persons which include "*a core participant*". It is not currently clear to us why Head 11 provides for questioning to take place in private. The investigative duty under

Articles 2 and 3 encompass requirements for both victim involvement to the extent necessary to protect their legitimate interests **and** of public scrutiny.

- Ministerial veto power over ICIR reports and their content - Heads 18 and 19 – We are concerned that these provisions and in particular the Ministerial veto over disclosure may be misused to prevent disclosure of information regarding State involvement or complicity in serious wrongdoing and that there are no adequate safeguards. We consider that in present form the provisions give rise to an unacceptable risk of incompatibility with Article 2 by denying victims and the community the right to the truth regarding serious human rights violations.
- Power of Garda Síochána to enter into agreements with Legacy Commission - Head 4 – we are concerned about the compliance of the Garda Legacy Unit with the Article 2 requirement of independence in Troubles cases, and especially where issues of collusion arise.

Amnesty International reiterates the need to establish a historical investigations unit / independent and effective mechanisms that satisfies the Article 2 independence requirement and to secure the public confidence necessary to achieve the aims of the Joint Framework.

I conclude by stressing it is imperative that the UK Government's Troubles Bill achieves human rights compliance, overturns the 2023 Legacy Act, and enables a much needed reset on rights and the rule of law. Further change to the Bill is needed for this to happen.

Both the UK and Irish governments have the opportunity to establish a positive blueprint for addressing conflict related violations. We urge this committee to heed the recommendations in our submission to ensure the General scheme upholds rights and delivers for victims.

ENDS