



Making Northern Ireland Safer For Everyone Through Professional, Progressive Policing

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST



Request Number: F-2010-03008

Keyword: Crime

Subject: Casualties - Paramilitary-Style Attacks

Request and Answer:

I am writing to confirm that the Police Service of Northern Ireland has now completed its search for the information.

I have today decided to:

- disclose in relation to questions 1 to 4 in full;
- disclose records in relation to question 5 and 6 subject to the deletion of information pursuant to the provisions of section 40 of the Freedom of Information 2000 (the Act)

Question 1

With regards to the statistics you publish on paramilitary-style assaults and beatings in Northern Ireland: What exactly are you including in the category of "casualties as a result of paramilitary-style attacks"?

Answer

We include all victims of an assault or shooting carried out on an individual or individuals by one or more persons usually from their own community. Typically, the reasoning behind the attack is either to intimidate the victim or to punish them for anti-social activities. Each paramilitary style attack is verified by the Investigating Officer.

Question 2

Does "casualties" include deaths or not?

Answer

Deaths are not included in these figures.

Question 3

Does it include all paramilitary-style attacks or is it just used to refer to those carried out as so-called "punishment beatings" on members of the paramilitary group's own community (this is often how the data is used in other publications, but I can find no evidence in your own statistics to clarify this either way).

Answer

These figures refer to “punishment beatings”

Question 4

What criteria are used in assessing what sort of violence fits into this category?

Answer

We count all paramilitary style attacks (brought to the attention of the police) where physical injury is inflicted on an individual – both major or minor injury. In the case of a paramilitary style shooting, the injured party is usually shot in the knees, elbows, feet, ankles or thighs.

Question 5

Are you able to provide any further breakdown of this data? You present it as number of casualties per year, are you able to provide more accurate dates in order to analyse the pattern of this violence?

Question 6

Do you have any more information on the targets/victims of this violence? Not in terms of personal information on individual victims, but a breakdown of victims by age, gender or religion?

Answer

Age, gender and perceived religion (based on the Investigating Officer’s attribution) are recorded for all victims of paramilitary style attacks.

Section 17 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 requires the Police Service of Northern Ireland, when refusing to provide such information (because the information is exempt) to provide you the applicant with a notice which:

- (a) states that fact,
- (b) specifies the exemption in question and
- (c) states (if not otherwise apparent) why the exemption applies.

The day and month of each collision has been deleted pursuant to the provisions of Section 40(2)(a) and (b) of the Freedom of Information 2000 by virtue of Section 40(3)(a)(i) of the Act, – Personal Information.

Section 17 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 requires the Police Service of Northern Ireland, when refusing to provide such information (because the information is exempt) to provide you the applicant with a notice which:

- (d) states that fact,
- (e) specifies the exemption in question and
- (f) states (if not otherwise apparent) why the exemption applies.

Age, gender and perceived religion (based on the Investigating Officer’s attribution) are recorded for all victims of paramilitary style attacks. However, to provide a full breakdown of age, gender and religion of the victims by year and month of the attack would amount to releasing personal information relating to the individuals involved ie that the individual was subject to a paramilitary style attack in a particular month of a particular year.

It would be possible to establish the identities of some of these individuals by researching incidents reported in the media at the time. Without having consulted the individuals concerned, it would be

fair to assume that consent would not be forthcoming for release of this information. It would be unfair to the individuals to release their information into the public domain without their specific consent and would therefore amount to a breach of principle 1 of the Data Protection Act 1998.

This has been addressed by redacting low level data from the attached tables containing the figures.

Section 40 of the Freedom of Information Act is a class based and absolute exemption under these circumstances, therefore a Harm Test and Public Interest Test are not necessary.

Details of age and gender of casualties are provided on the attached tables below. I can also inform you that between 1990 and October 2010 there have been 1,306 casualties as a result of paramilitary style assaults whose perceived religion was Protestant and 986 whose perceived religion was Roman Catholic. In the same timeframe there have been 1,065 casualties as a result of paramilitary style shootings whose perceived religion was Protestant and 673 whose perceived religion was Roman Catholic. All records are based on the Investigating Officer's attribution.

If you have any queries regarding your request or the decision please do not hesitate to contact me on 028 9070 0164. When contacting the Freedom of Information Team, please quote the reference number listed at the beginning of this letter.

If you are dissatisfied in any way with the handling of your request, you have the right to request a review. You should do this as soon as possible, or in any case within two months of the date of issue of this letter. In the event that you require a review to be undertaken, you can do so by writing to the Head of Freedom of Information, PSNI Headquarters, 65 Knock Road, Belfast, BT5 6LE or by emailing foi@psni.pnn.police.uk.

If following an internal review, carried out by an independent decision maker, you were to remain dissatisfied in any way with the handling of the request you may make a complaint, under Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act, to the Information Commissioner's Office and ask that they investigate whether the PSNI has complied with the terms of the Freedom of Information Act. You can write to the Information Commissioner at Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF. In most circumstances the Information Commissioner will not investigate a complaint unless an internal review procedure has been carried out, however the Commissioner has the option to investigate the matter at his discretion.

Please be advised that PSNI replies under Freedom of Information may be released into the public domain via our website @ www.psni.police.uk

Personal details in respect of your request have, where applicable, been removed to protect confidentiality.