



Northern Ireland: The Pending British Inquiry into Collusion in the Murder of Patrick Finucane

*Excerpts of Remarks by Rep. Chris Smith (R-NJ)
Co-Chair, Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission
November 19, 2024*

Good morning and welcome to everyone joining us today – especially to Geraldine, John, Katherine, and Michael Finucane – the widow and children of Patrick Finucane, renowned Northern Ireland human rights attorney, who was brutally gunned down, in front of his wife and children as they sat at their breakfast table, in 1989 by so-called loyalist paramilitaries operating in collusion with the British government.

This has been a 35 year cover up. There is no statute of limitations on murder.

The British government has yet to provide accountability, justice, or any semblance of closure. Yet, two months ago on September 11, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland [announced](#) that he has “decided to establish an independent inquiry into the death of Patrick Finucane under the 2005 Inquiries Act...” and that “the Government will seek to appoint a Chair of the Inquiry and establish its Terms of Reference as soon as possible.”

Geraldine, John, Katherine, and Michael will provide an update on developments since September, and on their long journey toward this inquiry, which is evidently not yet over.

For 35 years, the Finucane family has steadfastly and honorably pursued an independent public inquiry into the state-sponsored collusion in this murder. Geraldine Finucane and her children—now grown, successful adults—have left no stone unturned in their skillful, tireless, legal pursuit of justice. Their admirable and unyielding dedication to truth and justice—in the face of tremendous government and paramilitary opposition—rightly reflects the work and legacy of Pat Finucane and a family committed to the rule of law.

The underlying issue here is *collusion* – that is, British government cooperation or connivance in or facilitation of crimes committed by paramilitaries. During the Troubles, when, for example, the IRA or UDA or UVF, committed a bombing or murder, very often the British government knew about the crime ahead of time yet did *nothing* to prevent the crime, in which its agents were directly involved, since all paramilitaries were heavily penetrated by terrorists who had been “turned” by British security services.

For decades British officials indignantly denied collusion. When, after the Good Friday Agreement, the evidence of collusion became massive and irrefutable, the British government changed tack. It admitted collusion, and sometimes apologized, but sought to avoid providing accountability, punishing the guilty, making specific admissions.

The murder of Patrick Finucane was one of the worst instances of collusion, which by all accounts was obvious, shocking in its direct aggressiveness, and went right up to the upper levels of British government.

In 1998, the Good Friday Agreement of 1998--one of the most outstanding diplomatic achievements of recent decades--left a number of issues unresolved, including the issue of British collusion in paramilitary crimes.

In 2001, however, the British and Irish Governments dealt with this in negotiations at Weston Park. There the British Government assumed a solemn obligation to initiate a full, independent, public judicial inquiry into the Finucane murder and five other crimes if so recommended by retired Canadian Supreme Court Justice Peter Cory.

On May 5th, 2004, Justice Cory did recommend a public inquiry in the case of Patrick Finucane. He released his recommendation at the breakthrough [hearing](#) I chaired, at which Geraldine was also a witness.

Judge Cory said: "that there is evidence that would warrant the holding of a public inquiry" -- as he reviewed massive and multifaceted evidence of British government collusion, this was a phrase Judge Cory repeated many times. To date, the Finucane murder remains the only case Judge Cory investigated where his recommendation has not--I repeat, not--been honored. This is deeply unsatisfactory for many reasons, but not the least of which because it is likely the one where the British Government is probably the most culpable.

The Finucane murder is also a case in which--until the Prime Minister's apology in 2011--there has been the greatest level of sustained official denial and obstruction by various state agencies. Obstruction went to such a point that, rather than provide the promised inquiry, in 2004, the British Government prepared new legislation governing inquiries. This would allow the government to withhold evidence from the inquiry process. Total subterfuge.

Though in 2012 Prime Minister Cameron acknowledged and admitted "shocking"--that's his word--levels of collusion between the state and loyalist paramilitaries in the murder of Patrick Finucane, this does not substitute for the full exposition of the facts behind the British state's involvement in the murder of Patrick. Rather, the steady increase in the amount of evidence being revealed publicly that senior officials in the British state colluded in the murder has made honoring that commitment more important than ever.

The many previous denials and the time that has passed in the Finucane case has drained public confidence in the peace process and diminished respect for the rule of law in Northern Ireland. It must be said that there are those who oppose the peace process and their opposition is dangerous. The failure to address the case of Patrick Finucane in the manner

promised by the British Government provides a readily available propaganda tool for those who would abuse it to further their own ends.

Congress has long supported the Finucanes in their quest for justice. Many Members care deeply about the Finucanes, and will continue to support them.

The House has passed two resolutions, which I authored, urging the British government to establish a full, independent, and public judicial inquiry into Mr. Finucane's murder.

For example, in 2007 the House, and then the Senate, passed my legislation ([H. Con. Res. 20](#)), calling the British government to deliver on their commitment to implement a public, independent, judicial inquiry into the murder of Patrick Finucane.

In 2006, the House passed my resolution, [H. Res. 740](#) which specifically called for the establishment of the public inquiry.

The Congress also passed, and the president signed, my legislation that restricted U.S. training and exchanges with the former Royal Ulster Constabulary and to specifically exclude those RUC officials who may have any role in the murder of Patrick Finucane or Rosemary Nelson ([PL 106-133](#)).

This is the 21st congressional session I am chairing on justice issues in Northern Ireland, and the 11th at which a member of the Finucane family has testified about the family's quest for this inquiry.

In 1997, at my very first hearing on the issue of peace and justice in Northern Ireland, key witness Michael Finucane told our committee:

"I am not seeking revenge. I only seek the truth. The memory of my father and the courage he displayed in doing the work he did deserves nothing less. In or that my family and I can fully reclaim our shattered lives, we ask that the British government conspiracy behind the murder of Patrick Finucane be investigate and exposed."

Geraldine and John have offered equally compelling and moving statements at [my hearings](#) over the years and they know we have never stopped working with them to get to this truth.

In 2020 over [23 members of the U.S. Congress](#), including my friend Co-Chairman McGovern, joined me in writing to the then British Prime Minister urging him "to establish an independent public inquiry into state collusion in the murder of human rights attorney Patrick Finucane."

This is one of the most bipartisan issues on Capitol Hill.