

Attorney General for Northern Ireland

Guidance by the Attorney General for Northern Ireland

pursuant to

Section 8 of the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2004



No. 10

**GUIDANCE FOR THE POLICE SERVICE OF NORTHERN
IRELAND ON HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS RELEVANT TO
THE PROTECTION OF THE RIGHT TO LIFE**

Laid before the Northern Ireland Assembly on 18 September 2015



**GUIDANCE FOR THE POLICE SERVICE OF NORTHERN IRELAND ON
HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS RELEVANT TO THE PROTECTION OF THE
RIGHT TO LIFE**

1. This guidance is addressed to the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI).
2. It is intended to assist them in discharging their duty to protect the lives of police officers and other employees from dangers arising from the criminal acts of third parties. It acknowledges that the nature of the work of police officers often unavoidably places them in circumstances of great danger.

INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS

3. This guidance is based on international human rights standards, in particular:
 - Article 2 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms;
 - Article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;
 - Article 12(2) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights;
 - Customary international law requiring protection of human life.

INTRODUCTION

4. International human rights standards require States to adopt positive measures to protect the life and health of individuals within their

jurisdiction. Criminal justice organisations therefore have a duty to protect the lives of individuals where they know or ought to know, in view of the circumstances, that those individuals are at real and immediate risk from the criminal acts of a third party. There is therefore an obligation on criminal justice agencies to take reasonable precautions to minimise any potential risk and to protect their employees.

5. This guidance is without prejudice to the requirement on all public authorities to comply with their obligations under section 6 of the Human Rights Act 1998.

THE PROTECTION OF THE RIGHT TO LIFE

6. The international human rights standards expressed in the ECHR, ICCPR, and customary international law (including *ius cogens*) provide that everyone's right to life shall be protected. These standards require the State to take appropriate measures to safeguard life and oblige the State to provide a legal and administrative regime that effectively protects life. Unlawful killing must be subject to criminal sanctions; all deaths must be properly investigated, and the law must be effectively implemented.
7. Subject to narrow exceptions international standards require not only that killing be prohibited by the criminal law but also that sufficient mechanisms exist to ensure that the law is enforced. Consequently, whether life has been sufficiently protected by law will involve consideration not only of the content of the law, but also of the mechanisms for its enforcement and their application in practice. An effective legislative and administrative framework is required to provide sufficient protection against threats to the right to life.

8. The Police Service of Northern Ireland must take measures which are reasonably necessary and sufficient to protect the lives of police officers and other employees. Appropriate practical measures therefore should be adopted where these can reduce the risk to life. Where necessary, guidelines or policies should ensure that practical measures are undertaken and that practical guidance is provided to ensure the effective protection of people whose lives may be endangered.
9. Relevant guidance or policies must provide for appropriate procedures, taking into account the technical aspects of the activity in question, for identifying shortcomings in the processes concerned and any errors committed by those responsible at different levels.
10. The Police Service of Northern Ireland must take all reasonable measures within the scope of their powers to protect individuals from the immediate and known risks to which they are exposed. They must display due diligence in protecting the right to life and do all that could reasonably be expected of them to avoid a real and immediate risk to life. This includes taking preventative operational measures to protect individuals whose lives are at risk from the criminal acts of another individual.

REQUIRED MEASURES

11. Organisations must therefore take such steps as are necessary to avoid the risk to life. Such measures should include.

Appropriate risk assessment

- a) A regular risk analysis should be undertaken by criminal justice organisations. Information should be sought from appropriate sources on a regular basis about general and specific threat levels.

- b) A regular review or audit of policies and procedures designed to deal with risks to life should be undertaken to ensure they are appropriate and effective.

Administrative framework

- c) The Police Service of Northern Ireland should ensure an administrative framework to provide effective protection against the threat to the right to life – internal rules, policies, or guidance as appropriate should be in place, geared to the features of the risk and with regard to the level of potential risk to life.

Action

- d) Implementing measures which would limit, reduce or remove risks to the right to life. In dangerous situations all appropriate and necessary steps should be taken to reduce the risk to life.
- e) Ensuring adequate monitoring of current strategies and appropriate implementation of strategies effective in reducing risk.
- f) Not permitting identifiable and avoidable risks to continue where preventative action would be appropriate to reduce the risks to life.
- g) Dealing appropriately with factors identified as causing or aggravating risk.
- h) Reviewing situations and practices to ensure there is an adequate system in place to minimise any risk to life.
- i) Permitting employees to articulate concerns about risk and, on receipt of such concerns, evaluate them and take all measures that are reasonably necessary as a result.

Information

- j) Particular emphasis should be placed on the right to information. New and relevant information on the nature of any risk should be communicated appropriately within the Police Service of Northern Ireland and to any relevant employee where that information may be of assistance in risk limitation or avoidance.
- k) Appropriate warnings and guidance should be provided to individuals who may be at risk and to those who are responsible for them to allow appropriate consideration of risks and of any potential action required

GENERAL

- 12. The Police Service of Northern Ireland should ensure that this guidance is made available to police officers and other employees to ensure awareness of the above standards

REVIEW AND MONITORING

- 13. Difficulties encountered in the application of this guidance should be notified to the Attorney General as soon as possible.
- 14. The Attorney General will formally seek the views of the relevant criminal justice organisations on the revision or amendment of this guidance annually. It is open to those organisations to suggest revision or amendment of this guidance at any time.

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