

Rosemary Nelson

the life and death of a human rights defender

Introduction

Sometime between the hours of darkness on Sunday March 14 and the morning of Monday March 15 an explosive device was placed under the car of Rosemary Nelson, a solicitor in Lurgan. At approximately 12.40pm on the Monday the bomb exploded as the forty year old mother of three braked at the bottom of the street where she lived. At 3.10pm Rosemary Nelson was pronounced dead in hospital. She left behind a devastated family and a community in mourning.

In the aftermath of the murder two controversies have arisen which have dominated the investigation of this killing. The first concerns allegations that members of the RUC had routinely intimidated and issued death threats against the victim. This in turn has fuelled the second controversy. According to local people the attack took place against the backdrop of unprecedented security activity in the weeks and days leading up to the murder in the area surrounding the Nelson home. As a result there is widespread suspicion of any inquiry carried out by the RUC which in turn has led to demands for an independent investigation and inquiry.

We have sought to both answer and ask a number of questions. Why was Rosemary Nelson the subject of intimidation and death threats from members of the RUC? Was there unprecedented security activity in the weeks and days leading up to the murder near the Nelson home in Lurgan? Can the RUC carry out an effective investigation and what is the difference between an investigation and an inquiry? Where did the trail of collusion between members of the security forces and loyalist paramilitaries begin? Was adequate protection provided by those who had a responsibility to do so? Was a psychological climate created which demonised a person to death?

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