

JAMES ASHLEY SHOOTING
GOVERNMENT REFUSE AN INQUEST AND PUBLIC INQUIRY
6th August 2001

Deborah Coles, co-director of INQUEST, the organisation concerned with deaths in custody and their investigation, said:

“The failure to hold an inquest or a public inquiry into this death makes a mockery of the Government’s purported commitment to human rights. In order to protect the most fundamental of all human rights – the right to life - police use of lethal force must be subjected to thorough public scrutiny through an open, transparent and above all fair inquiry. This is essential so that matters of important public interest are not swept under the carpet and action is taken by the State to prevent the recurrence of such killings.

Public confidence in the police can only be maintained when the police are seen to be subject to the rule of law. The family of James Ashley has been utterly failed. INQUEST supports the Ashley family’s call for an independent judicial inquiry into the shooting to ensure proper public scrutiny of those responsible at an individual and corporate level and believe that this is the only appropriate Government response to the widespread disquiet surrounding this case.

This shocking state of affairs has once again exposed fundamental problems in the way the state deals with deaths at the hands of the police. The Government can no longer ignore the need for a fully independent public inquiry into the whole investigation process that follows such deaths.”

Pauline Ashley, sister of the deceased, said:

“All we have wanted is to find out the truth about what exactly happened on that night. Wherever we go we are hitting a brick wall. We will continue our fight until we get some answers.”

Notes for Editors:

In February 2001, the trial at the Old Bailey of the police officer that shot dead James Ashley in Hastings in January 1998 was halted by the presiding judge. At a separate trial at Wolverhampton Crown Court in the same month, the officers who planned the raid were acquitted when the CPS offered no evidence. Two of the officers involved were then promoted. Sussex Chief Constable Paul Whitehouse resigned in June.

In July the Ashley family met Rt. Hon John Denham MP to request that the Government hold a public inquiry and for full disclosure of the police inquiries into the shooting. One of the reasons cited for the decision to turn down this request was the holding of the inquest. The coroner has since written to the family saying that the inquest will not be re-opened.

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