

Nick Hardwick, Keynote Remarks

Nick Hardwick is chairman of the Independent Police Complaints Commission for England and Wales. The IPCC is less than two years old, but it already is handling one of the world's most notorious cases: the killing by British anti-terrorism police of Jean Charles de Menezes in the Stockwell underground station in London on 22 July 2005. In his keynote remarks, Nick Hardwick invoked that case to illustrate what is at stake in the insistence on police accountability:

“[A]s you know probably, Jean Charles de Menezes was suspected of being one of the suicide bombers who had attempted to set off devices on the London transport system, and somehow or other on July 22nd that suspicion turned to certainty and he was shot and killed by the police. Obviously there's a limit to what I can say about that case, but I wanted to raise it at the start because it seems to me that it raises some of the starkest questions around police accountability. ...[D]oes the interference of people like the IPCC, the demand for accountability we place on the officers involved in that incident, mean that next time, when maybe there really is a bomber on a train with a device they're going to set off, they'll hesitate for those few fatal seconds, and we as citizens will be at risk because of that? *Is there a contradiction between the safety of the public and combating crime on the one hand, and police accountability on the other hand?*”

In the remarks that followed, Nick Hardwick argues that there is no contradiction: police accountability will make the public safer. To support that contention, he describes the origins of the IPCC in “a breakdown in relationships between the police and the Black community.” The new accountability arrangements are designed to strengthen those relations, and Hardwick explains how, in theory and in practice, when the police accept responsibility for mistakes, it can lead ordinary citizens to trust them more.

In the course of his remarks, Nick Hardwick discusses the authority of the IPCC and the many different ways it can become involved in any of the 24,000 complaints made annually against the police in England and Wales. He discusses decisions the IPCC has made about whom to hire as investigators (a mix of police and investigators from other professions), how to provide more information to the public, and when to exercise its “guardianship function” which allows the IPCC “to draw out the operational lessons that arise from the conduct complaints that we deal with.”

The full text of Nick Hardwick's remarks is available on the Altus web site in English and Portuguese.