

Introductory Note by Francis Bennion

The following letter by me was published in *The Times* on 13 February 2004 as the lead letter. Passages in square brackets were omitted on publication. For letters in reply see *The Times* 18 February 2004 <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,59-1005597,00.html>.

Fair trials and suicide bombers

The letter signed by members of the Bar (February 7) refers to three fair trial principles: a public hearing by an impartial judge and jury of one's peers, proof of guilt beyond reasonable doubt, and the right to know the case against one. As another member of the Bar (of 53 years' standing) I would point out that impeccable fair trial standards can be preserved only in a peaceful, ordered society.

Where national safety is gravely threatened, these civilised standards may unfortunately need to be lowered. I recall that this happened with Regulation 18b in World War Two, which allowed enemy aliens to be locked up without trial. We felt it essential to do this for our own safety.

A new situation has now developed with the emergence of determined terrorists prepared to sacrifice their own lives. [Parliament, the symbol of our democratic freedom, is currently disfigured by ugly concrete barriers designed to stop their approach.]

Mr Jonathan Rule [letter, 4 February], says it is 'frightening' that, under Mr Blunkett's plans, to get a conviction of a suspected terrorist the person deciding will need only to conclude 'I think he did it'. Most law-abiding citizens think it far more frightening to have their lives threatened by suicide bombers