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STATEMENT

Death of ARTICLE 19 Founding Director: Kevin Boyle (1943-2010)

The human rights community is mourning the death of Kevin Boyle, one of the greatest human rights advocates of our time.

“Kevin’s premature death is a great loss for his family, friends and colleagues and the human rights community as a whole. Kevin was a fantastic human rights lawyer, a sharp mind and thinker who had tirelessly worked for human rights. It was Kevin who established ARTICLE 19 at the cutting-edge of law and policy on freedom of expression, a legacy that the organisation continues to strive towards today,” said Dr Agnes Callamard, Executive Director ARTICLE 19.

Kevin became the Founding Director of ARTICLE 19 in 1987, an organisation which was created to oppose censorship and to promote the realisation of freedom of expression by all.

William Shawcross, who was ARTICLE 19’s chairman at the time Kevin joined, says he thrived in the creation of the new organisation. *“He was superb at hiring good people and managing the staff, and equally good at producing incisive reports and taking part in campaigns for freedom of information. Everyone loved being around him.”*

During his time as Executive Director at ARTICLE 19, Kevin initiated a high-profile campaign on behalf of Salman Rushdie, whose novel *The Satanic Verses* had provoked a fatwa from the Iranian leader Ayatollah Khomeini. Kevin formed and chaired a special international committee in 1989 comprised of writers, publishers, booksellers, journalists, trade unions and human right activists to develop a "world statement" denouncing the *fatwa* as "armed censorship". As the Chairman of the *International Committee for the Defence of Salman Rushdie and his Publishers*, he prepared a report setting out the case for abolition of the crime of blasphemy in the interest of equal treatment of religious belief as well as freedom of expression in the UK.

Kevin was one of the world’s leading experts and advocates for international law on freedom of expression as well as on non-discrimination and minority rights. He was enthusiastic about promoting a greater understanding about the importance of freedom of expression for the promotion of non-discrimination, equal treatment, equality and inter-cultural understanding. He co-edited *Striking A Balance: Hate Speech, Freedom*

of Expression and Non-Discrimination in 1992, one of the first work of its kind on hate speech and a milestone for ARTICLE 19 and the free speech community. More recently, Kevin had played a key role in the development of the *Camden Principles on Freedom of Expression and Equality*, as a member of the international group of experts established by ARTICLE 19.

Kevin will long be remembered for bringing energy, imagination and creativity to each issue.

His interest and commitment to human rights developed from his experience of living in Northern Ireland during the early years of the conflict there. Press freedom was one of his important concerns. With Marie McGonagle, he prepared recommendations to the Irish government for the reform of defamation legislation. He challenged bans on media access for IRA leaders before the European Commission of Human Rights, and later represented Danish journalist Jens Olaf Jersild in a leading case dealing with the dissemination of hate propaganda on television. He developed an interest in freedom of religion, publishing a ground-breaking study.

In 1989, Kevin Boyle was appointed to the School of Law at the University of Essex, where he worked closely with Sir Nigel Rodley building up that institution's world-renowned Human Rights Centre. In 1990, at his initiative, the University launched its MA in the theory and practice of human rights. Twenty years later, just prior to leaving full-time service at Essex, Boyle was awarded an honorary MA in the programme that he had started, an unprecedented honour for the University. He served several terms as director of the Essex Human Rights Centre.

In September 2001, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson, recruited Kevin as her Senior Adviser. He began work in Geneva on 11 September and was plunged immediately into developing a human rights perspective on the terrorist attacks and their aftermath. One of his major decisions was to advise her to denounce the attacks on the World Trade Centre as a crime against humanity rather than simply a violation of human rights. Kevin Boyle wrote many of Robinson's key speeches during her final year as High Commissioner, and crafted positions on such issues as prisoner detentions at Guantanamo Bay. He later edited several of these texts for publication in a volume entitled *A Voice for Human Rights*.

Kevin Boyle remained an active barrister, and was most recently associated with Doughty Street Chambers, in London. He was a member of both the Northern Irish and the Irish bars, and of Gray's Inn in London. He filed many of the early applications to the European Commission of Human Rights concerning the conflict in Northern Ireland. In 1972, together with the American lawyer Hurst Hannum, he took the *Donnelly* case to Strasbourg, an individual application that mirrored the contemporaneous case filed by the Irish government against the United Kingdom. Much later, he directed his efforts to other human rights issues, especially those of the Kurdish minority in Turkey.

The esteem in which he was held by colleagues was splendidly demonstrated two years ago when a group of academics published *Strategic Visions for Human Rights Essays in Honour of Professor Kevin Boyle*. The book warmly celebrated Boyle's long career in human rights law, both as an academic and as a practising barrister.

“ARTICLE 19 current and former staff and board members have lost a great friend and colleague. ARTICLE 19 is just one of Kevin’s innumerable legacies in the human rights field. For the organisation, however, Kevin’s visionary commitment to freedom of expression and human rights will continue to inspire for generations to come,” said Dr. Agnes Callamard.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

- For more information please contact: Sejal Parmar, sejal@article19.org, +44 20 7324 2500.
- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.