

New Irish DNA Database to Combat Crime and Terrorism

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The Irish Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform has announced (19 January 2010) a proposed new law which will establish a national DNA database for use in criminal trials. The proposed law, in Bill format, is cited as the Criminal Justice (Forensic Evidence and DNA Database System) Bill 2010.

Once the Bill is enacted each person arrested will be required to give a DNA sample. A DNA profile generated from the sample will be placed on the new database, along with samples collected at crime scenes. The DNA profile may be matched with DNA samples taken from other crime scenes to link the arrested person to offences where the Garda (Irish Police) were not previously able to make a connection between the person and the earlier offence.

The Bill provides, amongst other things, for the DNA material of persons convicted of serious offences to have their materials held indefinitely and for the sharing of information on the DNA database with other EU Member States for the purposes of combating crime and terrorism.

The announcement of the Bill follows confirmation by the Garda that they will seek to extract genetic material from a bundle of cash dropped by thieves in February 2009 fleeing from Bank of Ireland's flagship College Green branch in Dublin city with the proceeds of up to €7 million. The theft was carried out by an armed gang and targeted a bank worker, his girlfriend, her mother and six-year-old nephew in a 'tiger-kidnapping'. Criminals finding it harder to break into banks and ambush cash-in-transit vans are now kidnapping the spouses and families of bank staff and forcing staff members to assist the criminals gain access to bank vaults. This criminal practice is now coined as a 'tiger-kidnap'. In this particular case the employee was forced at gunpoint to drive to work and was ordered to show a photograph of the kidnap to his work colleagues to coerce them to assist the intruders. The thieves fled after filling laundry bags with cash from the vaults in what is now the Republic of Ireland's largest ever bank raid. More than €1 million of the stolen cash was recovered by Garda following a series of raids on homes and cars across Dublin city in the 12 hours after the robbery.

In a separate development Irish newspapers have reported that an employee of Bank of Ireland has been arrested and is being questioned over a suspected inside job. If this was an inside job then sadly the employee not only disregarded the welfare of his colleagues and his family but further adds to what appears to be a growing trend of internal financial crime at Irish institutions.

Proponents of the new Bill argue that the DNA database will act as a further deterrent to criminals and should hopefully lessen the likelihood of crime generally. It is easy to see the merits of the database in light of the facts of the Bank of Ireland robbery. The Irish Council for Civil Liberties, a leading Irish rights watchdog, has stated that it will review the new Bill to establish if it strikes the right balance between catching criminals and protecting privacy.

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