

Peace demo appeal rejected

Peace protestors have lost a landmark appeal over police actions in stopping an anti-war demonstration days after the start of the Iraq war.

They had appealed against a High Court decision that it was not unlawful for police to forcibly turn protestors away near RAF Fairford, Glos, in 2003. The police had also sought to overturn a breach of human rights ruling arising from the same case. Sitting on Wednesday, three Appeal Court judges dismissed both appeals. They were challenging decisions by two judges in the High Court in February this year. It followed action by police, when three coachloads of people were searched and detained on the way to RAF Fairford and forced to return to London under police escort. The demonstrators appealed against a finding by Lord Justice May and Mr Justice Harrison that it was not unlawful for the police to turn the passengers away.

The police were urging Lord Chief Justice and Lord Justices Clarke and Rix to overturn the ruling that they had breached the protestors' human rights by detaining them in the coaches. Craig Mackey, assistant chief constable of Gloucestershire Police, said: "We have always considered that our responses were proportionate and all our decisions on the day were based on intelligence." He said no one on the coaches accepted responsibility for items found on the coaches including body armour, a smoke bomb and five shields. "Given these circumstances, and the fact that RAF Fairford, and other military installations in the UK, had been the scene of increasingly destructive disorder in the weeks preceding this incident, the police commander on the ground made the decision to turn back the coaches. "From day one we have vigorously defended this decision, which was made out of a genuine concern that if the coaches were allowed to proceed it would have resulted in disorder and criminal damage at RAF Fairford." Fairford Coach Action, representing more than 80 people who appealed against the police actions, say they are prepared to take their case to the European

Court of Human Rights. Their action is supported by Amnesty International and Liberty.