

Consultation on the Stormont House Agreement and the Introduction of a Statute of Limitations

The Stormont House Agreement of December 2014 seemed at the time to give some hope to innocent victims and survivors as it proposed several new mechanisms for dealing with the past. The proposals agreed by political leaders at the time include an independent Historical Investigations Unit, a truth recovery body allowing victims to receive information privately, an oral history archive, as well as proposals around a pension for the severely disabled and the introduction of an effective mental trauma service.

However, subsequent political rows mean that the mechanisms have still not been set up 3 years later. Once again, it would appear that victims have been let down by the British Government and political processes in Northern Ireland. Once again, they have been promised so much and given so little.

Victims are now urging James Brokenshire to start the long awaited public consultation phase on the proposals within the Stormont House Agreement. After all, this public consultation has been promised by Mr Brokenshire since last year, well ahead of the collapse of Stormont. The consultation period is now expected to begin within weeks, but will it bring us any closer to decision making and the implementation of agreed structures?

Over the last few weeks we have witnessed another controversy over the long awaited public consultation on the Stormont House Agreement. It is feared that this could in fact further delay the consultation. The government has decided to add a new section to the consultation document which will ask the public for their views on alternative approaches to addressing the past. This will include the controversial recommendation by the Defence Select Committee to introduce a Statute of Limitations which will prevent security force members from being prosecuted for alleged offences committed during the Troubles (before the signing of the Good Friday Agreement). This was not part of the agreed proposals in the Stormont House Agreement of December 2014, and its inclusion in the consultation document has taken many by surprise. Many feel that this step is putting the limited progress made on victims' issues at further risk.

So, why has the government decided to include such a controversial measure in this long awaited consultation? The government states that the conversations around a Statute of Limitations can't be ignored, and therefore this proposal needs to be included in the consultation to allow victims and survivors to have their say on the matter.

I have been talking to innocent victims and survivors about this issue during the last couple of weeks, and opinion is certainly divided. Some people feel that terrorists have availed of early release from prison, shortened sentences, On The Run letters, HM Royal Prerogatives of Mercy etc. while former members of the armed forces are subjected to investigations and arrests which some describe as a "witch hunt." They therefore see the introduction of a Statute of Limitations as a way of addressing the current perceived imbalance.

However, many others see an alarming picture emerging if this Statute of Limitations is introduced. Professor Kieran McEvoy from Queens University states that "if there's going to be a Statute of Limitations, that's an amnesty. It's an amnesty that will apply to all actors in the Troubles – both state and non-state." Legal opinion is very clear that any such Statute of Limitations to protect soldiers and police officers from prosecution would inevitably have to be extended to cover all Troubles-related deaths, and open the door to a general amnesty for everyone, including terrorists. The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission has also warned that if the Statute of Limitations was used to excuse acts constituting human rights violations (for example, the right to life), this would be incompatible with human rights law.

So, what do you think of this emerging issue? Your opinion will be shaped by your own experience of the Troubles, and I urge you to express this opinion during the consultation process. We will help you to do this by holding consultation meetings in your local area. In the meantime, if you want to have a chat about this issue, or to get more information on anything in this article, please do not hesitate to get in touch with me.

Wendy Stewart



The Queen's Award
for Voluntary Service

Advocacy for Innocent Victims Newsletter



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Dear Member,

It is getting close to Christmas once more, a time when we think of our family, friends and loved ones. I dearly hope everyone can have an enjoyable festive period.

This month we have featured a short piece from Rajaa Berezag whose father was badly injured by the 1996 Canary Wharf IRA bomb. We intend to feature a piece from one of our members every month; if you wish to contribute a short article to the news letter, please contact any one of the advocates by phone or email.

As part of our research, we are trying to locate the families of those murdered by the IRA in mainland Europe. In total 14 people were murdered between 1979-1990. We are still trying to locate the next of kin of the following, and if anyone can help, please make contact with us.

- Colonel Mark Coe, murdered outside his home in Bielefeld, West Germany, on February 16, 1980.
- Richard Michael Heakin, WO1, RRW, murdered August 12, 1988 in the Belgian port of Ostend.
- Ian Shinner, Millar Reid and John Baxter (RAF) murdered in separate incidents in the Netherlands on May 1, 1988.
- Maheshkumar Islania (RAF) murdered along with his six-month-old daughter Niurati in Wildenrath, West Germany, on October 26, 1989.
- Major Michael Dillon-Lee murdered at his married quarters in Dortmund, West Germany, on June 2, 1990.

Thanks again for your help

Ken



Manchester Service in Memory of the 1992 Bomb

On the first weekend of December a group of SEFF members met in Manchester. As well as a respite weekend for many, this also marked the 25th Anniversary of the 1992 Manchester Bombing. The service at St Ann's followed by the reception event were extremely well thought out and touching. The weekend also put the '92 Bomb back in the public domain, after it was aired on the BBC. This is a milestone for victims of the Troubles based in GB, who cannot remember being acknowledged by the mainland papers for years.

Furthermore, the efforts from SEFF volunteers and staff resulted in a remarkable weekend, the comradery and unity between victims/survivors was a privilege to witness. It was noticeable how SEFF members, based in Northern Ireland have benefited from the supportive, nurturing environment created by the staff, volunteers and members in Lisnaskea. One GB-based survivor recently described this as "the SEFF family", which to me is the warm and friendly buzz that was so prevalent throughout the Manchester weekend. With the GB area so vast we must be resourceful, innovative and committed to try and replicate the "SEFF family"

Kind Regards

Yasmin

Equality

I recently acted as the tour guide for a group from Omagh on the South Fermanagh Border Tour. It is intensely sad and harrowing at times to go through incident by incident as we travel through the roads and lanes of South Fermanagh. But this story must be told to remind and educate those who attend the tour. But what was it all for? Why did the IRA set out to murder and maim their neighbours? Was it their twisted logic that there was a perceived inequality and they were somewhat equalising the situation?

As soon as the coach left the SEFF offices we stopped to describe how the IRA put a bomb on a children's school bus that by some miracle did not murder a number of children, Protestant and Catholic. The children were collateral in the IRA's desire to murder the bus driver. We later travelled towards Rosslea and stopped at the point where the Army shot an IRA terrorist whilst he was caught in the act of trying to murder members of the Security Forces. This man was probably responsible for murdering upwards on thirty people in the South Fermanagh area. Sinn Fein IRA would claim this was all done in the name of equality.

Now, when Sinn Fein IRA realised that they were never going to defeat the Security Forces and were never going to break the will of the local people, the strategy had to change.

On 24th November 2014 in Enniskillen, Gerry Adams addressed a Sinn Fein audience. In response to a question of what is the point of being in Stormont, he replied, *"But what's the point? The point is to actually break these b+++++s - that's the point. And what's going to break them is equality. That's what's going to break them - equality. Who could be afraid of equality? Who could be afraid of treating somebody the way you want to be treated. That's what we need to keep the focus on - that's the trojan horse of the entire republican strategy - is to reach out to people on the basis of equality."*

Sinn Fein suddenly decided that they were the champion of minority rights, something that was never on their previous agenda. They had stumbled upon their trojan horse, the cover of championing the rights of minorities as a stealthy plan to bring down the Stormont government whilst appearing to be supporting others.

Adams was later to say in an interview with William Crawley on Talkback on the following day, *"I think the Assembly could collapse. I don't think Unionists have a game plan. The Assembly for many is the alternative to war."*

It all became clear, Sinn Fein had taken Stormont as far as was necessary, and Martin McGuinness's illness was the strategic time to pull it all apart. We can continue to tell the stories of how our kith and kin were brutally murdered by the IRA, the strategy has changed but the threat is still there.

Ken

Rajaa Berezag

My name is Rajaa Berezag, I am 30 years old and for 13 years I have been offering free dance classes and a safe space for children and young people in Tower Hamlets. I have dedicated my time and effort to provide kids aged 4-19 years old with fun, stimulating activities whilst promoting healthy lifestyle choices. When I was 9, my father Zaoui Berezag was caught in the IRA Canary Wharf bombing which left him brain damaged. He was coping well until 4 years ago when he had a heart attack and due to this lost his leg. I have dedicated my time to rehabilitate him and make sure he could have a good quality of life. This took a toll on my mother who passed away 2 years ago. I have dedicated my life to help my father with his general quality of life, whilst still continuing my role as a community dance teacher. After going to university I came back with enough knowledge to help my father's wellbeing, plus many more people with different disabilities.

<https://vimeo.com/155127974> (video of me, my father and some of my dancers)

I would love it if you took a moment to check out my GoFundMe campaign:

https://www.gofundme.com/EmbraceStudioAber?pc=em_co_cardshare_a&rcid=818fbec3328d4d18a5d7772ffd450b41

One love community is a charity organisation that has offered me a space to run as a community dance studio. In order to be able to get this off the ground we are seeking funding to prepare the space and offer free sessions in the future.

Kind Regards

Rajaa Berezag

SEFF have been assisting the Berezag family for approximately four years and Rajaa has now engaged with the Advocacy service. If you can afford to help her out with a donation for her charity, no matter how small, it would be very welcome.

An AfIV delegation were afforded a meeting with Dr Andrew Murrison, Chairperson of the NI Affairs Committee (NIAC) in Portcullis House, Westminster, on 05/12/17. Judith Jenkins, widow of Corporal Jeffrey Young who was murdered in the IRA bomb in Hyde Park in 1982., was also present. Items discussed were the victims of Hyde Park and other IRA atrocities in GB, and how the NIAC could support victims in the future.



L—R Yasmin Wright GB Advocate, Judith Jenkins , Dr Andrew Murrison, Ken Funston, Kenny Donaldson