

Meetings with Senior Police Officers

Members of the Advocacy Staff recently met both the Commissioner of An Garda Siochana, Drew Harris, and the PSNI Chief Constable. Whilst the meetings were held in a cordial manner, we had robust conversations around the important victim and survivor issues.

Mr Harris agreed that the Garda are in a difficult position if the Stormont House Agreement structures are implemented as they have no legacy type department in the force, and they intend to look at how they can set up something to mirror the role of the proposed HIU.



L-R ACC George Clarke, Ann Travers, Ch Const George Hamilton, Wendy Stewart, Pete Murtagh

On the evening of Wednesday 13th February, ACC George Clarke, part of whose responsibility is Legacy and D/C/ Supt Sean Wright in charge of PSNI Legacy Branch, gave a presentation at SEFF offices and conducted a Q&A with the audience thereafter. Mr Clarke reiterated a previous statement that he made in relation to the PSNI's opinion on the role of the HIU, "The PSNI is of the view that there is a compelling argument for all Troubles related deaths to receive an independent review by the Historical Investigations Unit (HIU)." That would correspond with the views of many of those who responded to the Legacy Consultation.

What he did make clear is, that at the present time the lack of resources and the capacity of the PSNI Legacy Branch, mean they can only deal with a few cases per year. He totally denied that they are unfairly focussed on the actions of the Security Forces in the past, even though the statistics would state otherwise.

When he was challenged by a member of the audience that the Chief Constable had agreed that there should be a debate on amnesties for terrorists, he denied that Mr Hamilton said that. However, in 2016 it was widely reported that Mr Hamilton, in response to the Attorney General stating that there should be 'a line drawn in the sand re the past,' said, "It's a debate worth having."



Advocacy for Innocent Victims Newsletter



AfIV Office (C/O SEFF), 1 Manderwood Park,
1 Nutfield Road, Lisnaskea
Co Fermanagh BT92 0FP

Feb 2019 Issue 21

For general Advocacy queries please contact the SEFF Office on (028) 6772 2242 or email advocacy@seff.org.uk

To contact Ken Funston by email ken.funston@seff.org.uk or mobile 07834488635

To contact Ann Travers by email ann.travers.afiv@seff.org.uk or mobile 07860 850003

To contact Pete Murtagh by email peter.murtagh.afiv@seff.org.uk or mobile 07860 850004

To contact Wendy Stewart by email wendy.stewart.afiv@seff.org.uk or mobile 07860 850008

To contact Aitor Martinez by email aitor.martinez.afiv@seff.org.uk or mobile 07860 850017

Dear Member

The NIO have still not issued any level of reaction to the near 18,000 completed responses to the Consultation. They originally suggested that they would make a statement within three months. I think that the level of rejection and disaffection to the proposal by many of the respondents has caused a problem.

Sinn Fein recently met the Victims' Commissioner, and following that meeting, their Victims and Legacy spokesperson Linda Dillon stated that, "It is beyond time the British government implemented the legacy mechanisms agreed at Stormont House in a human rights compliant manner. It is clear there should be no more delays to the implementation of those legacy structures." It is quite clear that the proposals meet the needs of republicanism, and their recent statement that the "UK Government was the main conflict protagonist," indicates how the structures can be used to assist them in their revisionist strategy. I again must reiterate that I do not think the British government was blameless in our terrible past, but I don't think I need to spell out what organisations were overwhelmingly responsible for thirty years of anarchy.

Behind the scenes there are others pushing for these unreformed structures to be imposed on us, thereby ignoring the views of the many victims and survivors who have made it clear that there must be fundamental changes before they can be accepted. We must be ready to challenge that agenda.

Yours

Ken Funston

Advocacy Support Manager



'Rubbing Salt into the Wounds' of Innocent Victims

One of the most insensitive issues facing Innocent Victims in Northern Ireland is everyday 'ex-paramilitary' members are paraded as though they are upstanding members of the community, many having served sentences for murder and other serious offences. But to 'rub salt in to the wounds' of the innocent victims, political parties insist on having prominent terrorist leaders at the forefront of their political process. These prominent individuals almost enjoy celebrity status, despite their proven crimes and involvement in past atrocities.

Many organisations such as Amnesty International were quick to judge and comment about actions of the state, yet over the years have done little to highlight the terror that was caused to innocent people going about their daily lives, they have generally refused to condemn the actions of any terrorist organisations in Northern Ireland. These 'ex-paramilitaries' are included in decision making bodies, as though their previous status alone makes them iconic personalities that must be listened to. They would no doubt like to make comparisons to other leading political activists such as Nelson Mandela, but South Africa cannot be equated to Northern Ireland.

However, in most other post international conflicts leading members of terrorist organisations did not get to take influential or high political positions on the cessations of violence. Sinn Fein's constant justification of their campaigns of terrorism is one of the greatest obstacles for society moving on, their condemnation of Dissident Republican attacks is hypocritical and hollow to say the least, because these groupings are using the exact rationale to justify their criminal actions of violence in pursuit of supposed political ends, whilst in reality being immersed in their own small abhorrent world of self-importance. The result being that the presence of these 'ex paramilitaries' is perceived by many members of the community view as a veiled or actual threat, constantly reminding them of what was and could be in the future if we do not pander to the wishes of these extremists.

If the Commander of the Parachute Regiment in charge at the time of 'Bloody Sunday' or any other soldier involved was given a prominent position in the Northern Ireland Assembly, whether continuing to justify their actions or not, there would be total outrage in the Nationalist Community. Yet Republicans parade their 'ex-terrorist' commanders/volunteers on a daily basis, we have to listen to them regularly in the media, almost like a deliberate provocation to get a response which will be portrayed as being obstructive to reconciliation.

Take Sean 'Spike' Murray for instance, there is significant media publicised material suggesting that he was involved in the importation of illegal weapons for the PIRA, not only after the last cease fire in 1997, but also after the actual signing of the Belfast Agreement in 1998 which included the agreement to decommission, yet he is the first to be invited by academics to sit on many Victims forums and debates.

Likewise, Gerry Kelly (who is very openly proud of his terrorist past); his attitude suggests total abhorrence for anyone or anything outside the republican movement. He displays open contempt for those not of the same political mind set, yet his opinion of his so-called justice is almost revered.



Chief Constable George Hamilton sharing a joke with 'ex-UVF' leader Winston 'Winkie' Irvine and 'ex-PIRA' leader Sean 'Spike' Murray at the West Belfast Festival last year

'Ex Loyalist Terrorists', whilst not tending to be involved in main stream politics groups, are more involved in politics and community groups at a local level. They are being influential because of their past positions of power that they used to ruthlessly terrorise and intimidate their own communities.

These individuals are involved in attempting to influence the decision making of some of the major political parties in Northern Ireland, and these 'ex-Republican and Loyalist terrorists' are treated as respected leading members of our community.

There are bereaved and injured Victims who have openly reconciled with and forgave prominent and supposedly reformed terrorists; which they have a right to do in a democratic society. But these victims despite being in the minority; are then put on a pedestal as somewhat representative of all victims. An unfair comparison is then made between them and other Victims who because of their inconsolable loss or suffering, are understandably unable to publicly express forgiveness to unremorseful perpetrators. These Victims are then unfairly looked down upon and judged by the media and academics alike as though they are the ones holding up the process of peace; not those who broke the peace, murdered and terrorised our community in the first place.

Pete Murtagh