

My Work as Research/Admin Officer with AfIV

Hello everyone, it has been lovely to be back in the office. Some of you may know me from previous introductions or have seen me in the office in Lisnaskea. Unfortunately the funding for my position has recently ended, therefore my time with the AfIV Team is running out. I did not want to leave without telling you a bit more about my time with SEFF. Firstly I will narrate a short background about myself for the ones that have not heard about me.

I used to live, work and study in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, where I met my husband, David, a real Fermanagh man, while he was in Amsterdam. I moved over to Fermanagh and we currently live in a small bungalow in Ballinamallard. We have been blessed with a beautiful 11 month old baby girl named Lilly. Before I moved over I used to work as a duty manager in a huge hostel in Amsterdam and worked as a lawyer at a law firm specialised in Family Law. From September 2017 until February 2017 I did an internship at SEFF, writing a research report on the definition of victim as it is written in the Victims and Survivors Order 2006. After which I finished my bachelor of Law. I was sad to leave SEFF, but then I heard of the opportunity to conduct research again for SEFF and help the AfIV Team as a research/admin officer. I started in September last year and I am currently finishing up.

During my time with SEFF we tried to conduct more research into displacement and forced relocation. SEFF already has an extensive list of people who were forced by terrorist action to leave their home, place of work etc., but there are many more who we have not yet got any details for. We are striving to ensure that the stories of displacement and forced relocation will eventually be told that might stem the scourge of revisionism. We informed our members of our research through Facebook and our newsletter, but unfortunately it did not give a lot of new leads. After speaking to a couple of people who were displaced it became clear why. Even 21 years after the “official” ending of the Troubles people still live in fear. Besides that some do not term what happened to them as displacement. But displacement can manifest itself in different ways such as: changing work places, changing way of life such as being unable to visit friends or relatives and many other ways. While conducting research I have seen a similar pattern with victims. Some people do not define themselves as victims, or are unwilling to identify as victims because the term could define their vulnerability. But there are those whose victims status has been denied or repressed often due to cultural, political and legal practices which can result in silence but also denial with the public. We hope history will not be rewritten because people stay in silence. If anyone feels they were displaced or knows other families who were, you can still contact one of the advocates or contact the office.

Also part of my role was trying to make the AfIV Social Media more known to the public. This meant I was posting content regularly on Facebook and Twitter and checking for indecent comments. But SEFF is currently in the process of merging some of our Facebook pages as well as updating our website. This will be a task for the new monitoring and admin officer. Just before I am leaving I am trying to find relatives of a group of soldiers who were killed in Fermanagh during the Troubles. Lots to do and little time. I like the quote from J.M. Barrie: “Never say goodbye because goodbye means going away and going away means forgetting.” So for now I will say: “see you later”.

Rachel Glover

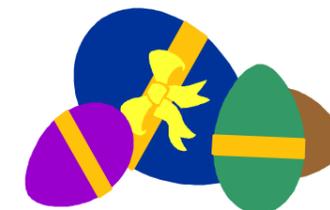
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Advocacy for Innocent Victims Newsletter



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Dear Member,

Advocacy for Innocent Victims and our parent organisation SEFF maintain the stance that we support innocent victims and survivors of the Troubles, irrespective of their religion or none. We maintain that position, and those who planned and carried out terrorist acts will not be supported by this organisation. However, I want to make this clear, there is a distinctive difference between planned terrorist action and where a member of the Security Forces (UK or RoI) has made an instinctive split-second decision in the middle of a gun-battle or a high-intensity public order situation. Unless you have ever been in a situation of this type, it is impossible to comprehend the decision-making process that goes on in someone's mind. Nevertheless, if a member of the Security Forces has set out to commit crime, then they must also be held accountable.

We met the Secretary of State, Ms Karen Bradley, in Stormont House on Friday 5th April. It does seem, from the tone of our conversation, that she intends to move forward with the Stormont House Agreement (SHA).

We made it clear our opposition to SHA in its current format, but our views may be falling on ‘deaf ears’. I fear that the SHA is a vehicle that will be used to investigate the State whilst ignoring the crimes of the terror organisations.

We challenged her on the failure of the RoI to do anything in support of victims, except for a select few, but it seems as if she is not prepared to challenge them in these matters. The perceived neutrality of the British government is not matched by the RoI who are selective in their actions.

The AfIV team will continue to support you in your quest for

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On the Run (OTR), Royal Prerogatives of Mercy (RPOM) or Any Other Excuse

When the Loyalist and Republican purveyors of death expediently stopped killing us in 1998 (unless they did 'internal housekeeping as described by Mo Mowlam) we were expected to give homage to them. The honour bestowed on Martin McGuinness two years ago was an example of this. Society today falls over itself to give these ex-gunmen an exalted place where none should exist. Meanwhile their victims are left to flounder and attempt to rebuild their lives.

I was reflecting on the issue of OTR letters and RPOM and other dirty deals that have been hidden from us. A heinous incident that I will refer to are the murders of Mr. William Herron (64), his wife Elizabeth (58) and daughter Noeline (26) who died in the resulting fire after an incendiary device was planted by the PIRA in their Dromore drapery shop on April 7, 1976. Two Portaferry sisters aged 27 and 16 and a Downpatrick man were jailed in connection with the murders. For unexplained reasons, in 1985 the then Secretary of State (SoS) Mr. Douglas Hurd exercised the Royal Prerogative of Mercy and the women were released after serving less than four years in prison. On the 30th anniversary, the Herron family's MP, Jeffrey Donaldson, at the family's request made an application under the Freedom of Information Act to access documented information about the early release of the two convicted sisters. This was refused by the SoS, the files are closed. These terrorist sisters weren't alone to be rewarded in this way.

Two PIRA leaders, Gerry Kelly and Brendan 'Bic' McFarlane, were part of the group of Republican prisoners who escaped from the Maze Prison in 1983. Kelly had been sentenced to two life terms for his part in no-warning car bomb attacks on the Old Bailey and Scotland Yard in 1973, whilst McFarlane received five life sentences for his part in the sectarian attack on the Bayardo Bar on the Shankill in 1975.

McFarlane very quickly became involved in terrorism again. In December 1983, he was allegedly part of a gang that kidnapped the businessman Don Tidey. The Gardaí eventually tracked Tidey and his kidnappers to Derrada Wood, near Ballinamore, County Leitrim on 16 December. One of the gunmen opened fire, killing trainee Garda, Gary Sheehan and an Irish Army soldier, Patrick Kelly; the gunmen escaped. McFarlane was later to be charged in the Rol with the kidnapping, but the case collapsed.

On 16 January 1986, Kelly and McFarlane were recaptured in the Netherlands. At the time of their arrest, they were in possession of cash in several currencies, maps and fake passports and the keys to a storage container that contained 14 rifles, 100,000 rounds of ammunition and explosives. They were part of a terrorist cell committing atrocities in mainland Europe.

On 4 December 1986, they were both extradited from the Netherlands to the United Kingdom and returned to the Maze prison. As part of the deal agreed with the Dutch authorities, they both received RPOM. On their return, Kelly could only be charged with his escape whilst McFarlane was still held liable for the murders at the Bayardo—it seemed like he wasn't as important to the Provos as Kelly. On 2 June 1989 Kelly was released after serving less than three years, McFarlane remained in prison until 1997. It seemed like there were deals being done with the Provos long before the 1998 agreement.

We are unsighted as to who else received RPOM in Northern Ireland but in 2014, the Labour MP, Kate Hoey tabled a question in Parliament to the SoS. In response, Theresa Villiers disclosed that 365 royal pardons had been issued between 1979 and 2002. Quite bizarrely and possibly conveniently, there were no figures for the ten years between 1987 and 1997, as the records have apparently been lost. So the figure of 365 will probably be much higher. It is not clear how many of those pardoned

The question of the OTR letters are even more worrying as these have been issued to terrorist suspects who have never been convicted, many of them suspected of evil crimes. It was believed that the letter received by John Downey and used in his defence in the Old Bailey for the Hyde Park atrocity stated:-

"The Secretary of State understands on the basis of information available that there is no outstanding direction for your prosecution in Northern Ireland, there are no warrants in existence nor are you wanted in Northern Ireland for arrest, questioning or charge by the police. The PSNI are not aware of any interest in you from any other police force in the United Kingdom. If any other outstanding offence or offences came to light, or any request for extradition were to be received, these would have to be dealt with in the normal way."

Downey has since been arrested in the Rol on suspicion of the murder of Jimmy Eames and Alfie Johnston near Enniskillen in 1972. The court there deemed he could be extradited, but Downey has appealed that verdict. That appeal will be heard in the near future, and the defence will no doubt refer to his OTR letter. The validity of the letters will be tested once more, even though many commentators would now conclude they are worthless; that remains to be seen.

The interlocutor between the British government and the Provisional movement, was, yes you've guessed it, Gerry Kelly. It is now known that he forwarded 228 names in total, of which 187 Republicans received OTR letters. We are unaware of most of their identities, leaving us in a situation where we are unsure if the authorities still want to pursue the main suspect(s) in the murders and attempted murders of our loved ones. Kelly's evidence at Downey's extradition trial stated the following:

"Sinn Fein for whom I speak in this statement emphasises that it is impossible to overstate the importance of the assurances given to the 187 recipients, which included John Downey, being maintained. These were essential in the achievements which began with the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, and were consolidated in the St Andrews Agreement in 2006 and the commencement of the Northern Ireland Assembly in 2007."

Our politicians continue to insist that they were unaware of the existence of the OTR letters until it was exposed at Downey's trial in London. I find that hard to believe that there was no knowledge of this considering the NIO, the police and the judiciary were all involved. The Hallett review into the on-the-runs stated the following:-

"The administrative scheme was not kept secret or highly confidential. Dozens of police officers, prison officers, government officials and politicians must have known that some kind of scheme was in operation by which individuals received assurances."

Yet, following the arrest of Downey, Gerry Kelly claimed it was "vindictive" and "an act of gross bad faith by the British government". However the OTR letters were never part of the Belfast Agreement. The question therefore we must ask, what other promises were made? Was Sinn Fein promised that retired soldiers would be arrested yet their own people would be left alone? It now appears that the 1998 Agreement was only the front for many other dodgy deals that are only now becoming apparent. Where will the Stormont House Agreement take us in the future?