

Will Society Learn from the Past Mistakes Regarding Victims?

Atrocities carried out in the name of Islamic State (IS) across British soil and beyond have been both barbaric and unforgivable and from a Northern Ireland perspective, we feel very much the hurt the victims and survivors are going through. A summary of the most recent attacks in the UK.

1. 22nd March 2017 - An Attack Westminster Bridge and Palace of Westminster, resulting in the death of 4 Civilians, 1 Police Officer, 1 Terrorist and over 50 persons injured through the Terrorist driving a Van at people on Westminster Bridge and then stabbing a number of persons, stabbing to death a Police Officer at Westminster Palace, before being shot dead by Police.
2. 22nd May 2017 - Manchester Arena Attacks at the Ariana Grande concert, a suicide bomber detonated a bomb in the foyer area of the Manchester Arena at the end of the concert killing 22 civilians; including children and injuring over 120 persons.
3. 3rd June 2017 - London Bridge Attack, a rammed into innocent civilians on London Bridge, 3 Terrorist then randomly stabbed people socialising in the Borough Market pubs and restaurants killing 8 and injuring 48, before all 3 Terrorists were shot dead by Police.

What the survivors and bereaved are going through at this time cannot be put into words, the majority will never get over their loss or what they went through as survivors. Some may cope better than others in trying to manage their feelings; but overall we all know those days will have a permanent mental scarring on all those traumatically affected, not to mention the physical injuries that will be carried.

Quite rightly there would be total National abhorrence and outrage if it was suggested that the perpetrators of those crimes (if they survived) or the families of those terrorists killed by their own actions should be treated in the same way as the victims, survivors and bereaved who just happened to be by chance catastrophically in the wrong place at the wrong time.

In fact, the term innocent is not even allowed to be officially used to differentiate between those 'supposed' victims who were involved (and their family's) in acts of Terrorism and those who were caught up in the events through no fault of their own. In regards to the family of terrorists, no-one is saying that they should be held accountable for the actions of their loved ones, coming to terms with their loss and what they have done will no doubt have a severe psychological effect on the family left behind (no-one either is suggesting that they should not receive support but that support should not be provided through the guise of them being victims alike those whom their loved one's harmed) It has to be recognised that this happened because of the drastic and barbaric action chosen by that individual; therefore, there has to be a distinction between how innocent victims and victim makers are treated and supported. Outside terrorist related crime the family of a convicted murderer or rapist would not be referred to as victims of that crime, yet there is no doubting how they have been affected by the crimes.

What if in 30 years' time it was suggested to what most rational person would regard as innocent victims of those recent I.S inspired attacks were told, "that well in the interest of peace and reconciliation, it's time that the loss of your loved ones are archived and everyone just moves on. And you and the victim makers will both receive the same compensatory pension".

That is and should be totally unthinkable; however, it has been attempted in Northern Ireland and history has a habit of repeating itself. Surely now is the time to protect real victims, and if the Establishment insists on giving cover to terrorists and their families by suggesting that they too are victims then steps must be taken, supported by legislation making clear the distinction between innocent victims and those who sought to create victims and who themselves then suffered death or injury or by extension, their families.

Pete Murtagh



The Queen's Award
for Voluntary Service

Advocacy for Innocent Victims Newsletter



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To contact Yasmin Wright (from Monday 4th September 2017 onwards) by email yasmin.wright.afiv@seff.org.uk or mobile 07860 850017

Dear Member,

SEFF's Advocacy service has completed its' final appointment following the filling of a GB Advocate position. Four support workers are now in place alongside Support Manager Ken Funston. The newest appointment (to be based in London) is Yasmin Wright who has previously been working with people with Mental Health Issues, Yasmin introduces herself in this Newsletter. We welcome her as part of the team.

Last week there was a presentation by the Victims Commissioner, Judith Thompson within Decorum NI offices in Bangor that members of the Advocacy team attended; overall the Commissioner highlighted her perspective on what might be implemented under the Stormont House Agreement; she did state that due to the current lack of political directive there was limit to what could be done.

We pushed the Commissioner on the timeframe for the setting up of the Historical Investigation Unit and what would happen in the interim period. Realistically the new unit is unlikely to be up and running for at least 2 years. The Commissioner acknowledged that the current PSNI Legacy Investigation Branch was not fit for purpose and did not have the capacity to deal with Legacy cases generally. In the meantime the AfIV service has little choice but to correspond with the Legacy Investigation Branch, despite their limitations.

We very much encourage you to continue to engage with the AfIV service and encourage others who may need our advice. Even if you are unsure as to what exactly we can do for you, do not hesitate to contact us and we can talk things through, we will be very much driven by your needs and how you want to take things forward.

Kind Regards,

AfIV Service Support Team





Yasmin Wright - SEFF's new GB Advocate

(Starting on 04/09/2017)

I was born and raised in Andalucía, Spain where I attended the English International College until the age of sixteen. Learning a second language and living in a multi-cultural community, I have always been motivated by deepening my understanding of social issues and gaining different perspectives in the UK and abroad. After my years spent in Spain, I attended Brighton College where I completed my A-Levels. I was then accepted into the University of Leeds to complete a specialist social science degree in Politics and History of the Middle East. I opted to complete a four-year course, which included an international placement year in Chile with the British Council. During this year, my core responsibilities were to teach English as a second language and run British Culture workshops for both teenagers and business people. After this, I travelled through South America for three months and lived with a Peruvian family in a rural town, where I helped a local NGO develop their educational and social programme for children involved in agricultural labour. I returned to the UK and completed my final year at the University of Leeds and I then started working at a London-based charity the Single Homeless Project (SHP). During my two-year stint at SHP I undertook three different roles. Initially, I was a Support Assistant within a residential setting for clients with needs around mental health, criminal convictions and substance use. I then worked as a Support Worker within SHP's mental health service in Westminster, where I carried a caseload of twenty-three clients. In this role, I worked alongside the NHS Secondary Mental Health Services and provided holistic support to clients around housing, welfare, health and meaningful occupation. For the past six months, as a Recovery Worker I have been central to the planning, development and delivery of a new Westminster Recovery Service, following the closure of the two main day centres. Alongside this, I completed a Counselling Skills certificate and Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) practitioner qualification. I am now confident that this next opportunity at SEFF will allow me to combine my experiences working alongside vulnerable people with my interest in learning about new political and historical landscapes. I am delighted to have been appointed this Advocacy role at SEFF, as I am committed to the establishment of a crucial London-based advocacy service for victims of 'The Troubles,' in order to overcome the geographical barriers for victims based in Great Britain. In this context, I also wish to raise awareness and empower victims of 'The Troubles'

How Legacy cases have been investigated ...

This is just to give a brief outline into the structures of how investigations into 'Troubles related deaths' have been dealt with from the work of the Historical Enquiry Team to the current Legacy Investigation Branch and a look to what is being talked about for the forthcoming Historical Investigation Unit.

Historical Enquiry Team

Set up in 2005 to investigate over 3,268 unsolved Murders that occurred between 1968 and 1998. The HET dealt with cases in chronological order starting with the oldest cases; however specific cases in certain circumstances were reviewed out of order. There were 2 elements of the HET; review of cases carried out by Police seconded from the UK mainland and investigations carried out by locally recruited investigators. The HET was disbanded in 2014, due to cutbacks on Agency staff and a damning HMIC report. At this stage the HET had dealt with just over 1700 cases up until 1988, though some 1988-1998 had been looked at for various reasons.

Legacy Investigation Branch

Came into being in January 2015 and is the current format for investigation into the past, it is a part of the PSNI that has 70 Officers. The LIB reviews cases; if any new evidence comes to light or new line of enquiry the case is then passed to the PSNI's C2, Serious Crime Branch to be investigated. Prosecutions are submitted through the Public Prosecution Services (PPS). The current Chief Constable George Hamilton has publicly said that he would be prioritising current investigations over what has happened in the past. Overall he has made no secret of the fact that he does not believe Legacy Investigation should be under the remit of the PSNI. Whilst one might respect his opinion; it is little consolation for innocent victims who are trying to get justice for their loved ones. LIB use a fairly complicated case sequencing model, based on Contemporary Persons of Interest/Forensic Potential/Criminal Justice Stated/Case Progression.

Historical Investigation Unit

Along with other structures, the HIU is specifically mentioned within the Legacy proposals contained within the Stormont House Agreement; though in reality previously it is probably at least 2 years away from being operational. The UK Government has committed some £150million towards legacy-based proposals (time-lined over a 5 year period) The Unit will come under the Policing Board; but be separate from the PSNI. Any prosecutions will be through the PPS.

Each month we will carry a piece from each of the new advocates, on their views in the new role, and how they have been progressing. Pete Murtagh will honour us with his musings this month, Wendy Stewart next month.

Peter Murtagh.

I am honoured to be have given the opportunity to be a part of the SEFF team, working with and overall moving forward the recognition, truth and justice that innocent victims of the 'Troubles' must be afforded if we are to ever move on to a more stable political platform in Northern Ireland. At the outset of the peace process there is no doubt that innocent victims were treated insensitively; their opinions and feelings were never taken into account when dealing with the past. There was almost a sense of well "You'll just have to move on, there is no point dwelling on what has happened". This never took into account the totally destructive impact of losing a loved one in the 'Troubles' or being a survivor of a terrorist attack.

The Stormont House Agreement has to some degree provided us with a new opportunity to make the voice of real victims heard, not what Politicians or Government bodies perceive as the right way forward, but what innocent victims need; to try and start living with the past. I do not believe that the Stormont House Agreement is the answer to all our needs, I have a number of reservations about certain aspects, but we have to face it and use it where appropriate to move forward the voice of innocent victims.

In my new role I very much look forward to recognising innocent victims as very much individuals, with differing needs and expectations. Our role has to be tailored and delivered to your needs and not any secondary agenda. I believe through initially treating innocent victims on an individual basis we will get a more accurate overall picture of what we really need to do to help innocent victims to start coping with the past.

Please do not hesitate to contact myself or any of the team with any questions or queries, all communication is in strict confidence. We will only takes things in a direction that you are comfortable in going, and no action will be taken without your permission. If you do have an HET report and wish to have reviewed by the Advocacy Support Team please contact any member of the Team.

Regards,

Pete

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Pete covers the Greater Belfast and Down areas working from:

- Decorum NI Bangor; 3 days per week.
- MAST, Kilkeel; 1 day per week (Tuesday's).
- SEFF Lisnaskea; 1 day week/fortnightly.