



Advocacy for Innocent Victims Newsletter



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Dear Member,

As Christmas approaches, it can be a difficult time for a lot of us when we remember those who we've lost in the past. The role that my colleagues and I are engaged in can cause old memories to resurface. We fully understand that, and alongside our service we have very professional and knowledgeable Health & Wellbeing staff and the availability of a Counsellor. We encourage you that if necessary, please avail of their services; their confidentiality and empathy is always a paramount consideration.

I once again ask you, our readers, that if there is a topic that interests you, please send me your views on it for inclusion in the next Newsletter. Likewise, we also inspire you to advise us of your thoughts on the Advocacy service. These of course can be entered anonymously if you so wish.

We very much encourage you to continue to engage with AfIV and inspire others who may need our assistance. Not everyone wants their own personal/family case reopened. It might be a more simple matter such as writing a letter to the authorities or engaging with a statutory body. 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. It will always be very much driven by your needs and how you want to take things forward.

Kind Regards,

Ken Funston

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Peter's Work Update

During November I have continued to engage with several new Victims, I have been working in the Cookstown area with MUVE, where a number of victims have come forward to use the SEFF Advocacy Service. At Remembrance Sunday I met and got to spend time with family members who lost loved ones in the Ballygawley Bus Bomb; which was very appropriate with the 30th anniversary coming up on 20th August next year. I also did a talk in relation to the Advocacy Service to MAST in Kilkeel, these meetings tend to be beneficial and victims are starting to come forward as a result of them, and they do generate good discussions.

Regards
Pete

Ann's Work Update

Another month has passed by and the work in the Advocacy Office continues. In the past month I have been busy contacting families and individuals in the Republic of Ireland affected by terrorism and invited them to come along on our day trip to Dublin, where we hope to visit, Aras an Uachtarain, the home of Michael D Higgins and his wife Sabrina. I have arranged lunch at Le Bon Crubeen on Talbot Street, a street which witnessed the carnage of the Dublin bombs and the on to the Dail for a tour. The Northern friends will leave and, I've arranged a meeting room in the Irish School of Ecumenics, Trinity, so our Southern friends can meet with our Director of Services Kenny Donaldson and representatives from the Health and Well Being and Advocacy Teams. Together we support each other and don't feel alone.

I've also been working on a research project, trying to trace the families of the fourteen innocents murdered in Europe by the IRA in the '70s, 80s and 90s. As I read their stories and get to know a snap shot of their lives, I feel an immense sadness and hope that I will be successful in my mission, so we at SEFF can reach across the waters and offer our support to families in Australia, Belgium, Holland, Germany and the UK.

Regards
Ann

Yasmin's Work Update

November With the help of a number of GB victims/survivors and other SEFF colleagues I have been busy organising the service and reception event to commemorate the first Manchester Bombing, committed by the PIRA in December 1992. Sixty-five people were injured and a number of buildings were damaged. Despite this act of terrorism having appalling consequences for many innocent civilian's lives, it is shocking that today a number of representatives at civic level have sometimes overlooked and often confused this PIRA attack to be the 1996 Manchester Bombing. The service and reception event invitations have now been sent to GB victims and families, as well as to one hundred councillors and thirty MPs of Greater Manchester. We are working with the local media to cover the day - it will commence at 11am on the 3rd December 2017 at St Ann's Church, followed by a reception event that will be held at the Mechanics Conference Centre.

Regards
Yasmin

Wendy's Update

This has been another busy month for the Advocacy Service here in SEFF. I have undertaken many meetings with victims to keep them updated on progress with their case. I have also met with some victims who are new to the service. I have received some referrals from the Health and Wellbeing Service here in SEFF, and in meeting these victims, I can see clearly how the Advocacy Service and the Health and Wellbeing Service work hand in hand in helping and supporting a victim. I have also spent a considerable amount of time over the last few weeks preparing for a meeting with the families involved in a multi-atrocity case. This work is extremely detailed, and time consuming, however, I find it extremely rewarding and a great honour to be allowed to take on this work on behalf of families who suffered so greatly at the time of the event, and indeed, who are still suffering to this day.

Thanks go to the Lisnaskea UDR Association who allowed us to attend their recent meeting to raise awareness about our services. I'm currently working with the Health and Wellbeing Service to plan more awareness raising sessions in the area, and to do a leaflet drop to relevant agencies. There are various ongoing training courses organised by VSS for those of us who are relatively new in post. Last week I attended a very useful Safeguarding Children and Adults course in Dungannon. This was a really interesting course, and it got us all thinking about our responsibilities regarding Safeguarding.

Regards
Wendy

The Rise of Revisionism

Following a period of conflict in any country, all sides attempt to justify their position with a somewhat jaundiced view of the past. Our recent history was dominated by sectarian strife during the Troubles with the Security Forces attempting to keep a lid on the situation. We are now led to believe that it actually was a 'glorious war against inequality,' and those who prowled the night with murder in their heart were actual freedom fighters.

Revisionism may be described as the theory or practice of revising one's attitude to a previously accepted situation or point of view, it is a re-interpretation of the moral meaning of the historical record. We are now assaulted daily with an opinion that is somewhat different to what actually occurred.

I listened recently with interest to Good Morning Ulster 09-11-17, when Noel Thompson had the writer/journalist Peter Taylor and Tommy McKearney the convicted IRA murderer as guests. I was somewhat surprised with the latitude given to both guests by the interviewer whilst they discussed the atrocity committed by the IRA at the Enniskillen Cenotaph in 1987.

McKearney commented, *"The Enniskillen bomb was devastating as far as the IRA is concerned"*. I would suggest it was more devastating for the affected Enniskillen families and the wider community in the area. How devastating would the bomb in Tullyhommon have been is today unquantifiable. This is McKearney's attempt at making the bombers and the IRA the victims, no thought was given to the real victims.

Peter Taylor goes on to say, *"I don't think the intention of the bomb was to kill civilians. The target was the Security Forces who were at the Cenotaph for the Poppy Day Parade."* Even Mr Taylor's terminology is lazy journalism, it was not a Poppy Day Parade, it was the Remembrance Parade. As an experienced journalism, and his research would indicate this, PIRA always reced their operations. They would have been fully aware that it was civilians who stood beside the Reading Rooms, and they were totally indifferent to whether they murdered civilians and/or members of the Security Forces. Likewise, they planned to murder children in Tullyhommon at the same time, and Mr Taylor conveniently dodged this fact when Noel Thompson referred to it.

Taylor went on to say, *"The deaths of the civilians obviously lies with the IRA but in particular with the active service unit which I think was a cross-border unit who planted the bomb in the library in front of which many civilians were standing."* I would suggest that Mr Taylor would also be fully aware that there were a number of other IRA units involved in this operation, and local guides assisted in scouting the routes and guiding the bomb to its final destination. Yes, Mr Taylor local people assisted in the placing of the bomb, and not as you suggest outsiders who didn't really understand what they were doing.

McKearney then goes on to say that, *"There never was a policy of killing civilians."* Now I cannot speculate on the BBC's standpoint on this but why was this statement not challenged. I do not have to list the many hundreds of pre-planned operations where the IRA targeted and murdered civilians, including my own brother, yet the BBC gave this platform to McKearney and Taylor to give this interpretation of the past that shows no resemblance of what really happened. It's probably what we expect from Mr McKearney but when we have such a senior journalist as Taylor allowed to speak in this way, questions have to be asked of the BBC and of the ethical standpoint of Taylor.

Noel Thompson later states, *"Some people would be unhappy with the term 'murdered' on the memorial."*

Mc Kearney responds, *"I don't use that term (murder), I don't use the term in relation to any of the deaths that were inflicted throughout the conflict in the north."*

Mr Thompson then asks, *"Do you think they were murdered?"*

McKearney replied, *"I think they were killed in the course of the conflict, I would always be reluctant to use the term murdered."*

I am at a loss to understand McKearney's mentality, and if, in his mind, no-one was murdered throughout the Troubles, why are republicans pursuing retired members of the Security Forces and demanding public inquiries and Article 2 Inquests? What is abundantly clear is that whilst many commentators refer to the rewriting of history, this advance of revisionism is being assisted by organisations and individuals who should be more responsible in their reporting.

Ken Funston

The Continual Non-Deliverance for Innocent Victims

In the continuing political stalemate, once again our politicians and society generally has failed our innocent victims; though there is no recognition of this fact. This does not just date back to the recent political debacle; but, with a significant proportion of cases this goes back to the very outset of the investigation. When meeting new victims one of the first questions I tend to ask is in relation to the original investigation and their overall impression of how thorough and effective they felt it was.

What has surprised me greatly is how many of the victims inform me there was little or no contact between the Police and themselves from the very beginning. I fully realised they were difficult times for the Police due to the volume of serious crimes they were having to deal with; surely, they must have realised the trauma these families were going through (especially when a lot of those murders were in relation to their own colleagues), but a phone call would only have taken a matter of minutes.

As has been said many times, on the signing of the Belfast Agreement there was a serious misperception that a line could be drawn in time and what happened in the past could stay in the past; the general feeling being 'Sorry for your loss, you were one of many' but, 'now is time to move on', with nothing being done to recognise the loss many families went through when their loved ones were going about their daily life or lawful duty. Instead they were grouped and respectively almost demonised and criminalised in the same category as the terrorists of both sides of the divide, as though all were equal.

Then fast forward some 7 years later to the setting up of the Historical Enquiry Team (HET) in 2005 to try and bring about some justice for all. In relation to contact between the HET and families, this is somewhat inconsistent, with some of the investigators taking time to meet with and consult with the families several times; other families were merely delivered a report with little or no explanation surrounding it. I have now reviewed and looked over numerous HET Reports, the majority are somewhat lacking; they tend to be very 'samey' and 'generic', as though it was a mundane process that was just been gone through. Some of the reports do highlight mistakes in the original investigation, but overall no actions were taken to redress these obvious errors.

Overall HET reports are very difficult to interpret and understand for any lay person, never mind a traumatised victim trying to make sense of it all. Then there has been the disproportionate focus by HET on the actions of the State to satisfy the Republican propaganda machine; no-one is saying that these actions should not be investigated, the point being that all innocent victims from all sides should be treated equally. This mind set appears to have been carried forward to the present Legacy Investigation Branch (LIB).

Yes, and here we are today, we have the LIB, born of austerity in 2014. The Chief Constable fully admits the 'past' is not a priority for the PSNI and the Victims Commissioner admits the LIB is 'not fit for purpose' (her own words at a recent meeting in SEFF).

Any correspondence submitted by the Advocacy Support Team is usually replied to with the standard condescending apologetic letter stating, "financing and resourcing pressure facing the police service is inescapable and will dictate the pace (or lack of it) at which the LIB can work and it is impossible to give any firm timescale for cases to be investigated". The Stormont House Agreement was signed off in December 2014; and here we are nearly 3 years later and still no real sign of it coming into being, with full implementation likely to take at least 2 years if the go ahead is given.

SEFF continues to have its' concerns with what is currently proposed, we need to be assured that there is a means to hold terrorism accountable within the structures proposed. There needs to be some form of Government in Northern Ireland, be it direct rule or the NI Assembly in place to move this forward. The Sectary of State this week announced an interim budget for NI to buy time for further negotiations to take place, again further delaying the process.

Next year will be 20 years on from The Agreement of 1998; the last year that troubles related murders/attacks are recognised, and 50 years from the start date of 1968. Over the past few months, numerous victims/survivors have suggested to me this is a deliberate ploy and they are waiting for us to all 'die off.'" When you look back over what has been done to help innocent victims over the last 20 years it is a hard argument to counter.

I now fully understand why Victims are so frustrated, cynical towards and feel very much rejected by all political processes; at the end of the day, the political system whether local or national has failed to deliver the Truth, Justice and Acknowledgement they have a right to.