

From: PS/Secretary of State
15 May 1998

PS, Mr Pilling (B&L) - O

2860
18 MAY 1998

Full
Victims
Duffell 18/5

VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE

The Secretary of State launched, with Sir Kenneth Bloomfield, his Report 'We Will Remember Them' on 13 May in Parliament Buildings. A copy of the speaking note she used, as amended by both Mr Jeffrey and Mr McCusker, is attached.

2. This was a well attended and moving event, with poems read by Michael Longley and an, at times, emotional address by Sir Kenneth. It was followed by a Question and Answer session lasting some 30 minutes. Some of the contributions from the invited audience were supportive of the Report but there were a number of concerns about over-centralised control of victims and negating the work done by WAVE, Lifeline, etc.

3. The Secretary of State considers that there is now a lot of work to be done on this subject. We are committed to a period of consultation, to carefully considering Sir Kenneth's recommendations, to setting up a point within Government to deal with all of this and to serve the Minister for Victims, ramifications for Social Services, Criminal Injuries, other Government departments and how they deal with victims and so on. She would like to see consideration of all of this as a matter of urgency and would be grateful for a note setting out a work programme, timeframe, staffing implications and where it might be dealt with within the office by 29 May, if possible. The Secretary of State has also commended the work done by Mary Butcher in all of this and her commitment and would like you to consider how her experience might be further utilised in any follow-up action.

W K Lindsay

W K LINDSAY

PS/Secretary of State

☎ (B) 28110

(L) 6462

cc: PS/Secretary of State (B&L) - O
PS/Mr Murphy (B&L) - O
PS/Mr Ingram (B&L) - O
Mr Jeffrey - O
Mr Steele - O
Mr Watkins - O
Mr McCusker - O
Mr Kelly - O
Mr Daniell - O
Mr Beeton - O
Mr Maccabe - O
Mr Canavan
Ms Butcher - O
Mr Warner - O

BLOOMFIELD REPORT: SPEAKING NOTE

“The tragedies of the past have left a deep profoundly regrettable legacy of suffering. We must never forget those who have died or have been injured, and their families. But we can best honour them through a fresh start, in which we firmly dedicate ourselves to the achievement of reconciliation, tolerance and neutral trust, and for the protection and vindication of the human rights of all”.

These are not my words. They are the shared words of all the Parties and reflected on page 1 of the Agreement reached on Good Friday.

That was not, however, the only acknowledgement in the Agreement of the victims of violence. In looking forward to the results of the Northern Ireland Victims Commission, the participants in the Talks recognised that victims have a right to remember as well as to contribute to a changed society and went on to highlight the needs of young people in particular who have been affected by the troubles. They called for the allocation of sufficient resources to meet the needs of victims and provide for community based support programmes.

I am delighted to be able to publish today the results of the work of the Northern Ireland Victims Commission. I am very grateful to Ken Bloomfield not only for this excellent report but also for the sensitive way in which Ken carried out his Commission. This was not an easy task and I believe the report which you have provided will enable all of us to focus clearly on how we can continue to help those who have suffered over the last 30 years.

In welcoming the Report, I wish to pay tribute to those organisations, for example WAVE, Victim Support or Lifeline who over the years have given tremendous support to victims. I should also pay tribute to the many public services which have provided help and support, often in very difficult circumstances.

Ken has suggested in his report that there should be a period of up to 3 months for interested individuals to react to the Report and the recommendations. I think all of us need to take some time to reflect on some major recommendations, for example, in relation to issues like a truth and reconciliation commission, a permanent memorial or a memorial day. Others are more directed at the Government machine for example a review of criminal injuries compensation, better trained

councillors, improved pain relief services and better training of mental health and general practitioners. These are issues which we will examine carefully and urgently and give a response as soon as possible.

Other areas do seem, however, to be capable of immediate commitment. For example, the report suggests that in the public and private sectors there should be more sensitivity to the special circumstances of victims and their carers. In particular within the Social Security System, public employees need to be sensitive and understanding in their approach.

These seem to me not to be issues which require consultation but represent common decency and I and my Ministerial colleagues will do all we can to ensure that the public sector at least will respond with the sensitivity which the Report suggests.

I do agree with Ken that someone at senior level in Government should be designated to co-ordinate our approach to the problems which victims face. I have therefore asked Adam Ingram to undertake a role as the Government's "Minister for Victims". He will ensure that progress is made speedily to consider all recommendations of the Report and to ensure early implementation of measures which find agreement to

support the interests of victims and their families. In summary he will act as the Government's listening ear.

We have already made clear our commitment in financial terms. In addition to many millions of pounds provided by the Compensation Agency to the victims of terrorist violence, we have very recently provided an extra £4.5 million for the RUC to fund a Police Federation initiative under the police retraining and rehabilitation trust.

Last week the Prime Minister made clear his commitment to support the victims of violence of Northern Ireland when he indicated that £5m would be available as a down payment to support work for victims. This will be available to support the recommendations flowing from this Report which find agreement amongst the interested individuals and groups. I do not want the further consultation to be a prolonged operation. Ken has consulted widely already and I believe we should be able to put an extensive programme of support in place fairly quickly.

Perhaps one of the most difficult issues flowing from this report is the question of a lasting memorial for victims. This is an issue about which I would like to hear further thoughts and opinions. Many people argue

strongly for a lasting memorial and Ken has rehearsed in the Report the many sensitivities associated with such a development. I myself have no fixed view on the form of a lasting memorial and I would greatly welcome all contributions to this debate.

There have been too many victims. We must do all we can to care for those who remain and that is why this Report is so important to me. In the coming months as we talk about the brighter future for Northern Ireland the pain of victims and their families will all the more acute. They will need all our help and support through this difficult time. This Government is determined that the victims of the last 30 years will not be forgotten.