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Local & National

Outrage at Bloody Sunday 'insult'

Tuesday, June 05, 2007

By Sarah Brett

Relatives of people killed on Bloody Sunday today reacted furiously after a former Northern Ireland Ombudsman said the £200m spent on the Saville Inquiry could have been put to better use.

The brother of one of the dead today blasted Irish Senator Maurice Hayes for his "insulting rhetoric" questioning the validity of the inquiry into the killings.

Mr Hayes made his remarks at Magee College in Derry last night.

John Kelly, whose brother, Michael, was one of 13 unarmed civilians killed by paratroopers in the Bogside on January 30, 1972, said Senator Hayes "has a nerve" and accused him of prejudging the outcome of the multi-million pound Saville Inquiry.

The former senior civil servant chose to give his verdict while delivering last night's annual Tip O'Neill peace lecture, stating that the inquiry will not uncover the definitive truth surrounding the killings.

The former Northern Ireland Ombudsman said the £200m could have been put to better use and warned that a fixation with "picking at the sores of old wounds" could threaten the delicate political arrangements established to strengthen reconciliation.

"I do not believe that the Saville Inquiry will unearth the essential truth, the definitive account of the events on Bloody Sunday, which are so deeply incised on the psyche of this city," he said.

"I can think of many better things to do for the families of victims and survivors for £200m."

Mr Kelly today said he and the other bereaved family members were "well used to listening to old rhetoric".

"The point of the inquiry was to seek the truth - he is trying to undermine that and everything that the families have campaigned for all these years.

"He talks about picking at sores, but this has always been an open wound that we are trying to close.

"Frankly, I think he has a nerve coming into the city and criticising our years of work. As far as I know he never attended a day of the inquiry. To prejudge its outcome is an insult."

In his speech on the theme Moving Out of Conflict, Mr Hayes said he was unconvinced that any critical new revelations will emerge.

He also suggested: "And if Bloody Sunday, why not inquiries for every other atrocity, beginning at Abercorn and ending at Omagh?"

The inquiry, established in 1998 by Prime Minister Tony Blair following a campaign by the families of those killed and injured, is not due to publish its findings for at least another year.

With work preparing the official report ongoing, Secretary of State Peter Hain confirmed in January that costs had topped £176m.

Although from Northern Ireland, Mr Hayes was appointed as an independent member of the Republic's Senate.

His high-profile career has also included roles as a Permanent Secretary in Northern Ireland's Department of Health and Social Services and on the Patten Commission set up to map out sweeping reforms of the old RUC.

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