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Local & National

My fears for McCord's life

Ombudsman tells of UVF death threats to collusion campaigner

Tuesday, January 23, 2007

By David Gordon

Police Ombudsman Nuala O'Loan last night spoke of her fears about the UVF murdering campaigning father Raymond McCord before the truth about his son's killers was exposed.

Mr McCord's long struggle to prove that his son died at the hands of a loyalist gang riddled with Special Branch informers was vindicated yesterday by a devastating Ombudsman's report.

He has been repeatedly warned by police about UVF threats to his life, with the latest alert coming just last Saturday.

Mrs O'Loan told the Belfast Telegraph that she made representations to the police about Mr McCord's security.

She also did not share information with him during the course of her investigation in case it heightened the risk of a murder bid.

Mrs O'Loan said Mr McCord had helped bring about "massive changes" in policing.

"Raymond McCord is a man for whom I have a huge respect.

"He's a very brave man and a very determined man. He has put his own life on the line to try to bring the murderers of his son to justice.

"He received a lot of threats during the time we were working."

The Ombudsman said she had been "very concerned" about Mr McCord's personal security during her office's investigation and had made contact with the PSNI.

"I would go through to the police and say I'm hearing about more threats to Mr McCord, will you take appropriate action? And they did," Mrs O'Loan said.

The Ombudsman rejected allegations from aggrieved former Special Branch officers that details of the investigation had been leaked.

She said there had been a "complete close down policy" on information, motivated by security concerns.

"To be quite blunt, I wouldn't tell anybody anything and I certainly wouldn't tell Raymond.

"I was afraid that if people thought he knew, they might try and come and get him, and it might make the threat to him worse."

The Ombudsman's report yesterday linked the UVF in Mount Vernon, north Belfast, to between 10 and 15 murders, including the 1997 killing of Raymond McCord Jnr.

A number of the UVF gang's senior members, including its leader Mark Haddock, worked as Special Branch informers.

Haddock, a police agent between 1991 and 2003, is suspected of ordering the McCord murder to cover up his involvement in the drugs trade.

Police intelligence has also linked him to other killings, as well as attempted murder, extortion, drug-dealing, intimidation, "punishment" attacks and a bomb attack in the Republic.

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The Ombudsman's report accused officers of "collusion" and said Special Branch's actions had "consolidated and strengthened" the UVF in North Belfast and Newtownabbey.

It said police failings identified in the probe are "highly likely" to have been replicated with other informants. The implications of this are "very serious", the report added.

Haddock is currently serving a 10-year jail sentence for a vicious assault on a Newtownabbey pub doorman. That offence was committed in December 2002 - when the UVF man was still a Special Branch informer.

Families of victims of the Mount Vernon UVF have slammed the fact that no prosecutions are to follow Mrs O'Loan's report.

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