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## Victims body 'mirrors community divisions'

By Noel McAdam  
Thursday, 26 March 2009

The head of the watchdog which monitors the First Ministers' Office has warned that Victims Commissioners are becoming too closely identified with separate communities.

Danny Kennedy MLA said: "The Victims Commissioners were designed to show evenhandedness among all victims. The situation is not, and never should become, one of republicans having one or more victims commissioners and loyalists having another.

"The preposterous situation where four victims commissioners were appointed now seems to be leading to a perception that each side has its own commissioners.

"That is a wrong and deeply flawed attitude. It will lead to strife, misunderstanding and trouble. It should not be a pick and mix situation. If we have to go on wasting money on four commissioners instead of one then all will have to show impartiality among the communities."

The Ulster Unionist Assembly deputy, who chairs the First Ministers' scrutiny committee, made his attack after almost four-year-old comments by one of the commissioners, Patricia MacBride, surfaced from the Shared Troubles website.

In it, Ms MacBride, whose IRA volunteer brother was killed by the SAS and whose father died 17 months after being shot by loyalists, told of her feelings as a 14-year-old girl.

Part of it said: "I am so proud of my brothers — their dignity, their courage, their refusal to concede. The three saluting by the grave; and the one beneath the clay..."

The Ulster Unionist Assembly deputy said it had caused deep offence to genuine victims. "It might be her own family experience but it totally inappropriate in her present position. How could anyone who suffered at the hands of terrorists have any confidence in that?" the Newry and Armagh MLA asked.

Ms McBride said, however: "This story, which I wrote in 2005, about the death of my eldest brother, who was my surrogate father for 11 years, is deeply personal, is, as all stories of loss will be, shaped by my own life experiences and nothing more. It was never designed to cause offence to anyone and I am sorry if it has.

"My personal experience of the loss of my father and brother during the conflict is one of the reasons why I was appointed to this role, in that it demonstrated I have an empathic understanding of victims and survivors and the issues they face."

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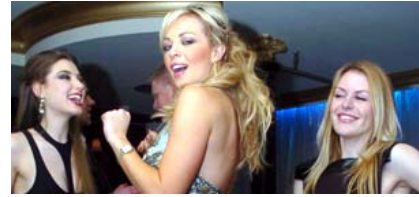


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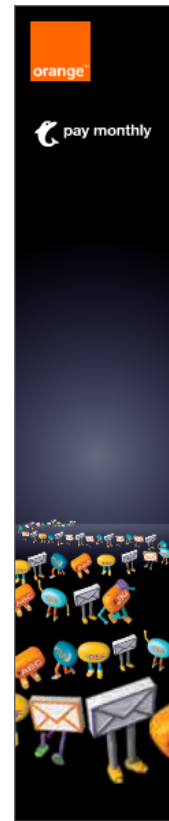
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