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'Equality of grief ignored'

Andersonstown News

by Damian McCarney

29/01/2007

The outgoing Interim Victims Commissioner has come under fire for recommending the setting up of a fund for the spouses of Ulster Defence Regiment members killed during the conflict.

Bertha McDougall, the widow of an RUC Reservist killed by the INLA in 1981, ended her controversial term as Interim Commissioner with a final report entitled 'Support for Victims and Survivors – Addressing the Human Legacy', last week.

Earlier this month a High Court judge ruled that Mrs McDougall's one-year appointment by the Secretary of State Peter Hain had been "improper and politically motivated."

Relatives For Justice spokesperson, Mark Sykes, who is a survivor of the UFF gun attack on Sean Grahams bookmakers on the Ormeau Road in February 1992 in which UDR collusion is suspected, was scathing of the report.

"Mrs McDougall was a DUP nominee and was appointed on that basis by Peter Hain without due regard to Section 76 and other potential candidates. "A core demand of the DUP has been the establishment of a special fund for the UDR/RIR - Mrs McDougall's report recommends the establishment of such a fund mirroring the DUP's demands.

"Singling out a state actor to the conflict that has taken many hundreds of lives through official collusion is disturbing to say the least.

"The UDR/RIR were a sectarian militia and Mrs McDougall should reflect on this particular recommendation.

"Many families find this completely offensive and consequently feel excluded, their experience at the hands of this notorious sectarian organisation not being taken into consideration at all.

"Rather than supporting victims' and survivors' needs across the community equally, Mrs McDougall has managed to resurrect the hierarchy of victims reinforcing the hurt and pain of so many families affected by state violence," added Mark.

"This hierarchy is a failed agenda of the past and her report was an opportunity to address disparity.

"Unfortunately this was an opportunity lost."

Brenda Downes, whose husband Sean was killed by the RUC in 1984 and who took the legal action against the Secretary of State over Mrs McDougall's appointment, said that the recommendation of the UDR fund came as no surprise.

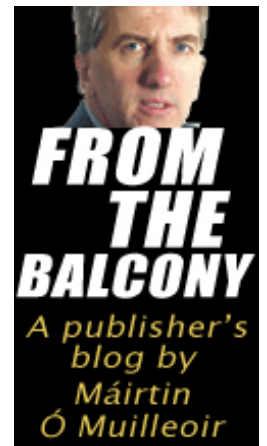
"Why separate those [UDR] people from people murdered through state violence?"

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"Why single them out and say you are going to be the more deserving than anybody else?"
"It legitimises state killings as far as I'm concerned," added Mrs Downes.

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