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Parties divided over Eames/Bradley

By William Graham Political Correspondent

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Parties were divided at Stormont last night on the report by the Consultative Group on the Past, with some MLAs saying it had been “fundamentally undermined” by a proposal for £12,000 payments to all victims’ families.

A motion tabled by the DUP’s Lord Morrow and David Simpson was passed on a voice vote.

It said it recognised the importance of meeting the needs of victims but condemned proposals which equated “perpetrators of violence with innocent victims”.

Separate amendments put forward by Alliance and Sinn Fein were defeated by 71 votes to 21, and 48 to 40.

Sinn Fein’s Raymond McCartney said its amendment recognised the grief felt by relatives of all victims. He called for a constructive debate on the way forward.

“There is a requirement on all of us to address the tragic human consequences of the past,” he said.

“Throughout we will be guided by a number of principles including our call for a truth recovery process.

“All the processes should be victim-centred. There should be no hierarchy of victims.”

However, Mr Simpson said people had been outraged by the Eames/

Bradley report and there should be no blurring of the line between the “terrorist and the terrorised”.

DUP colleague Arlene Foster also said there were many victims who had been re-traumatised by what they had heard about the report.

Alliance said it too had grave reservations about the ‘recognition payments’ but recognised the potential for other proposals to provide an effective way to assist victims and address the past.

Party leader David Ford said there was considerable merit in the concept of a legacy commission looking at reconciliation, justice and information recovery.

The SDLP’s Dolores Kelly said political groups should not be using the issue of victims to seek historical absolution for “favoured groups” of victim-makers.

Mrs Kelly said the truth of many murders could be quickly established if the filing cabinets of the British security services were to be opened, and if the IRA and UDA were to “step up to the mark”.

Ulster Unionist Alan McFarland said he wanted to stress the importance of innocent victims of the conflict and that they must look after their medical needs as well as ensuring support for their families.

The PUP's Dawn Purvis said that the report should not be dismissed out of hand, with people not just seeking truth and justice but medical assistance and in some cases financial assistance.

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