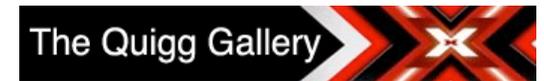


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Society cannot ignore legacy of past: Eames

By Barry McCaffrey

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Efforts to deal with the legacy of the Troubles should not be restricted by financial constraints, the Consultative

Group on the Past has said.

Co-chairman Robin Eames issued the warning yesterday during an address to a victims' group in west Belfast.

Insisting that the concerns of victims could not be ignored by wider society, the former Church of Ireland Archbishop said: "Outside the victims sector there are many who would wish the past away; who believe that if we simply throw money at meeting the physical and emotional needs of victims then they should be happy, should go away and allow the rest of society to get on with the future.

"Dealing with the past is not just about victims – it is about our entire society.

"If we are to truly deal with our past, of course we must look after the well-being of those who have suffered most.

"But to stop there is to stop far short of actually dealing with the fundamental issues that led to our society ripping itself apart over the last 40 years."

Lord Eames rejected criticism of the amount of money already spent on funding public inquiries.

"Some argue that enough money has been spent on dealing with the past and that nothing more should be done," he said.

"They say that the current processes should simply be allowed to run their course.

"If we base dealing with the

past solely on how much it will cost in financial terms then we

will be making a huge error of judgment."

However, in his address to the group Relatives for Justice, Lord Eames admitted that Northern Ireland could find itself still dealing with the past in 35 years unless an alternative approach was found.

"We do not believe the current legal processes are the best way to deal with the legacy of the conflict," he said.

"So we either find a better way or we let these processes continue for many years to come."

Insisting that his group's report would seek to find ways to "finally close this violent chapter in our history", he said: "Not everyone will agree with everything in it – that would be unrealistic.

"But for anyone to dismiss it because this is just too difficult to deal with or because it would cost too much would be the biggest insult to the thousands of people, – ordinary people like you – who suffered over the last 40 years."

Relatives for Justice spokesman Mark Thompson said only the establishment of an international, independent truth commission could bring closure to families who had lost loved ones through state collusion.

"Eames/Bradley have the opportunity to take a bold step to depart from the failed policies of the past," he said.

"An independent international truth commission provides the best opportunity for truth recovery for the greatest number of those affected by the conflict.

"Until this is established victims of state violence will carry on with their campaign."

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