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Saturday, January 24, 2009

Proposals are offensive and disturbing, says Robinson

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SIMON FINN in Belfast

REACTION: THE NORTH'S First Minister Peter Robinson has described the Eames-Bradley proposals on dealing with the legacy of the Troubles as "offensive, disappointing and disturbing" and a "betrayal" of innocent victims of the conflict.

Unionists were particularly angered by a proposal to pay £12,000 to the families of all people killed in the Troubles, regardless of whether they were republican or loyalist paramilitaries.

The Consultative Group on the Past is due to include this proposal in its report to be published on Wednesday.

"The reported proposals do not represent an approach which would be in any way acceptable to the DUP and the people we represent. We will not support any proposal which would blur the line between terrorist and innocent victim," said Mr Robinson.

"We will be ensuring that the government does not insult the innocent victims of terrorism by giving any weight to these offensive recommendations. I have no doubt that many innocent victims will feel betrayed," he added.

Ulster Unionist MEP Jim Nicholson said the £12,000 payment was a "highly damaging, immoral proposal that will undermine both community relations and political confidence".

"It endorses the morally flawed notion that a terrorist killed while undertaking a mission of murder has the same status as an innocent civilian murdered in a bomb attack or a

member of the security forces murdered in front of their family. People across our entire community will find this suggestion repugnant," he added.

"The government must understand in the clearest possible terms that this proposal is totally unacceptable," said Mr Nicholson.

Sinn Féin Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness said the report should be "independent and victim-centred" and that people should await the report's publication before making "definitive comments".

Traditional Unionist Voice leader and MEP Jim Allister called the proposal "outrageous". "Do Lord Eames and Denis Bradley have no sense of justice?" he asked.

SDLP Assembly member Alex Attwood said the proposals must be carefully considered. "The needs of victims and survivors are not time-limited and cannot be measured in financial or other quantities. These proposals should be judged on an ethical basis", he said.

Alliance Party justice spokesman Stephen Farry said that establishing "truth, justice and a sense of closure" was more important to most people than financial considerations.

Michael Gallagher of the Omagh Support and Self-Help Group said he was dismayed by the suggestion that there would be no further public inquiries, as he believed such an inquiry represented the only means to establish all the circumstances surrounding the Omagh bomb.

Victims' group FAIR spokesman Willie Frazer said the report was aimed at "sanctioning the work of terrorists" and "rewriting history".

This article appears in the print edition of the Irish Times

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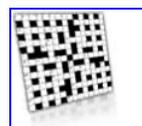
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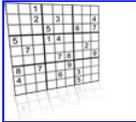
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