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Commission committed to treating terrorists as victims – Allister

14 October 2008

Following a protracted battle with OFMDFM which resulted in the intervention of the Information Commissioner, Traditional Unionist MEP Jim Allister has obtained documentation which raises serious questions about the Victims' Commission. Commenting Mr Allister said:

“Way back in February I submitted a Freedom of Information request to OFMDFM. Following a complaint to the Information Commission, the Department has finally disclosed some of the information I requested. The reason for the delay is obvious.

“Those who interviewed candidates for the post of Commissioner – and it was still a commissioner at that stage – in November 2007 were provided with a list of “Points to look for at interview”. Among these was “A commitment to the broad definition of victim and survivor provided by the Victims and Survivors (Northern Ireland) Order 2006”.

“This Order defines a victim or survivor as someone who is or has been physically or psychologically injured as a result of or in consequence of a conflict-related incident, thus equating the terrorist injured by his own bomb with the innocent victims of Enniskillen and La Mon.

“It is nothing short of outrageous that a Department jointly under DUP management should be complicit in propping up this obscene definition – a definition which DUP spokesmen, from time to time, have publicly claimed to oppose. How can innocent victims how have confidence in the proposed Victims’ Forum which is supposed to consider the definition? After all, the Forum must “act in accordance with principles laid down by the Commission as to the conduct of its business” (Outline Draft Strategic Approach for Victims and Survivors).

“Additionally, interviewers were instructed to look for an ability to “work with different political parties”. Of course this includes Sinn Fein/IRA – an organisation most innocent victims would have nothing to do with.

“The documents which I have obtained also raise serious questions about the willingness of the Commissioner for Public Appointments to stand up to OFMDFM. Minutes from a meeting which she had with joint First Ministers Paisley and McGuinness on 11th September 2007 reveal that she thought the initial process relating to the selection of a commissioner “had been very well run in line with OCPA guidance and that there had been a good level of interest and field of candidates.” However, when McGuinness suggested that Direct Rule had made some people “reluctant to apply” she meekly rolled over and agreed that this would be a legitimate reason to begin a new process.

“Small wonder that, at a further meeting held on 5th October 2007, the joint First Ministers “thanked the Commissioner for her help and very positive approach”!

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- [October 2008](#)
- [September 2008](#)
- [August 2008](#)
- [July 2008](#)
- [June 2008](#)
- [May 2008](#)
- [April 2008](#)
- [March 2008](#)
- [February 2008](#)
- [January 2008](#)
- [December 2007](#)
- [November 2007](#)
- [October 2007](#)
- [September 2007](#)
- [August 2007](#)
- [July 2007](#)
- [June 2007](#)
- [May 2007](#)
- [April 2007](#)
- [March 2007](#)
- [February 2007](#)
- [January 2007](#)
- [December 2006](#)
- [November 2006](#)
- [October 2006](#)
- [September 2006](#)
- [August 2006](#)
- [July 2006](#)

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 - [May 2006](#)
 - [April 2006](#)
 - [March 2006](#)
 - [February 2006](#)
 - [January 2006](#)
 - [December 2005](#)
 - [November 2005](#)
 - [October 2005](#)
 - [September 2005](#)
 - [August 2005](#)
 - [July 2005](#)
 - [June 2005](#)
 - [May 2005](#)
 - [April 2005](#)
 - [March 2005](#)
 - [February 2005](#)
 - [January 2005](#)
 - [December 2004](#)
 - [November 2004](#)
 - [October 2004](#)
 - [September 2004](#)
 - [August 2004](#)
 - [July 2004](#)
 - [June 2004](#)
 - [May 2004](#)
 - [April 2004](#)
 - [March 2004](#)
-
- [Top](#)
 - [Home](#)
 - [Accessibility](#)