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DURKAN WELCOMES MOD RECTIFICATION ON DANIEL HEGARTY

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SDLP Leader and Foyle MP, Mark Durkan MLA, has today welcomed the apology from the Ministry of Defence to the family of Daniel Hegarty for the groundless claim that he had been a terrorist when he was killed by the British Army during Operation Motorman. He added that he would still be pursuing the wider matter of the Army assessment with the MoD.

Mr Durkan said, “I welcome the sincere apology issued from the Ministry of Defence to the family of Daniel Hegarty for the unfounded and untoward allegation in a public Army document that he had been a terrorist. Daniel Hegarty was an innocent child who not only suffered the ultimate wrong in having his life taken from him by the state but who then suffered the additional wrong of having his name blackened by it. I raised this issue with the Secretary of State for Defence in July and he had agreed to meet me to consider it further. I am pleased that, on this occasion, the Ministry of Defence has moved more quickly and more fully than most of those with an interest in this travesty had expected.”

Acknowledging the determination of the family he said:

“The family of Daniel Hegarty is to be respected for the fortitude and determination that they have shown throughout their effort to have this issue rectified. I wrote to the current Secretary of State for Defence in 2003 when, as Victims Minister, he issued an inappropriate and insensitive letter to the family. This was then apologised for. The family has consistently been motivated by honour and not by animosity. Despite the significant obstacles put in their way, they have remained steady and strong. The withdrawal of this slur and the recorded righting of this wrong against Daniel’s memory is testimony to their resilience and good faith.”

Speaking on the wider issue of the British Army record of the conflict, he added:

“I welcome this amending of the Army record as the Minister honouring a commitment that the Daniel Hegarty slight would be rectified. However, I am concerned that the Ministry of Defence has stated that it intends to issue a new version of its assessment of the conflict. There are unfortunately a number of other families whose tragedies and travesties have been misrepresented by this document, including the Bloody Sunday families. I will be pursuing this matter further with the British government in order to see that they will have their burdens eased by the removal of additional injustices in the guise of this document.”

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