

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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Meeting between the Taoiseach and the Family of Patrick Finucane, Government Buildings, 24 February, 2000.

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Attendance:

Taoiseach
Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Brian Cowen, T.D.
Minister of State, Liz O'Donnell, T.D.
Mr. Walter Kirwan
Mr. Gary Ansbro
Mr. Paul McGarry

Finucane Delegation

Geraldine Finucane
Michael & John Finucane
Martin, Séamus & Dermot Finucane
Peter Madden - Legal Partner of Pat Finucane
Eamonn McMenamin - Lawyer, Madden & Finucane's Solicitors
Jane Winter - Director, British Irish Rights Watch
Paul Mageean - Committee on the Administration of Justice
Mary Lawless - Director, Amnesty International - Irish Section

The Taoiseach opened the meeting by welcoming Geraldine Finucane and the Finucane family and he regretted that he was unable to meet them earlier as originally planned. He was glad to have the opportunity to meet with them one year on from their contact with Minister of State, Liz O'Donnell. The Irish Government had followed the case closely. Pat's murder was a fundamental attack on the legal system and the truth had to be established. Both he and the Minister for Foreign Affairs had consistently pressed the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on the case. The Irish Government had held back in calling publicly for a public inquiry in order to allow some space for the current police investigation, but he believed that it was time now for the Government to speak out.

Ms. Winter formally presented the latest British-Irish Rights Watch report to the Taoiseach. She said that it was the most shocking report they had ever written. The report asserted that there was machinery within the British system which targeted people for murder. When they had presented their earlier report to the British Government, they said at that time that all the information necessary to establish the truth was within the British system. Since then Rosemary Nelson had also been murdered. She believed that the Pat Finucane case contributed to the climate whereby Rosemary could be murdered. Since they had presented their earlier report there had been momentous developments, especially the arrest of William Stobie. He says he passed information in advance to the RUC but they doubted his evidence that he did not know that Pat was the intended victim. His evidence raised more questions about police involvement, either in the murder itself or in a cover-up. There were also serious questions about the role of the DPP who had engaged in a series of deals where the only motivation was cover-up. The only way to ensure that nothing like it every happened again was to have a full public inquiry.

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Geraldine Finucane said that the only reason they came to meet the Taoiseach was to get the support of the Irish Government. The issue needed to be brought to Prime Minister and Taoiseach level. The family was not happy with the Stevens investigation. They believed that the establishment of the investigation was a strategic move by Ronnie Flanagan. It had been done while Mo Mowlam was in New York. They did not know what had happened in the first and second Stevens inquiries. They wanted an independent inquiry into the affair. They wanted the Taoiseach to organise a meeting between the family and their representatives and Prime Minister Blair. They viewed the current investigation as inadequate. There was a conflict of interest for Ronnie Flanagan. He had been in the RUC Special Branch, who had recruited Stobie.

Mr. Mageean believed that the report of the Stevens investigation would not be published. Even if criminal charges were brought, they wouldn't see the basis for those charges or the extent of evidence. It is only to a public inquiry that the truth could be established publicly. As with Bloody Sunday, they believe they would only get progress on the issue if it was raised at Prime Ministerial level. He said that the UN Special Rapporteur would present a new report on the case to the UN in Geneva in April.

Ms. Lawless said that Amnesty had been looking for a full public inquiry since 1991. They had sought a legal opinion because Mo Mowlam had looked for a legal opinion regarding the establishment of a public inquiry, given there were ongoing investigations in train. Their opinion was that a public inquiry would not compromise the current investigation or trial. They needed a public declaration that the Taoiseach wanted an inquiry.

Geraldine Finucane said that initially the family believed that if they established the truth of what happened it would help families like the Slanes and the McDaids. Since Rosemary's murder, they believed that Pat's murder was part of a wider policy and this was a terrifying prospect. She believed that before there could be a move towards a peaceful society what happened in the past had to be faced.

Peter Madden quoted from Tony Blair's statement on the establishment of the Bloody Sunday Tribunal, when he said that "where the State's own authorities are concerned we must be as sure as we can of truth". We have a similar situation with the Pat Finucane case.

In response the Taoiseach quoted his letter of June of last year to Prime Minister Blair when he wrote that "having regard to the British Irish Rights Watch report on the Finucane case and our assessment of it, I consider the case for a public inquiry is compelling and I would ask you therefore to proceed urgently in this regard." He said that he had sent that letter 8 months ago, which gave the British Government time to establish the inquiry.

Geraldine Finucane said that she had spoken to the British Ambassador in Geneva, Audrey Glover and Geraldine had gotten very angry. She had reminded the Ambassador that Pat's murder was not a cold and clinical thing. He was murdered in front of herself and the children. She had said last year that they would be patient. But she wanted Prime Minister Blair to know directly the feelings of the family.

The Taoiseach responded that he had no difficulty in pressing the Prime Minister to meet the family. He quoted the statement that he proposed to issue after the meeting. He said that he

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would say "I restated our clear view that the case for a public inquiry into the murder of Pat Finucane is compelling. This view has already conveyed to the British Government. After a lapse of more than a decade since Pat Finucane's murder, and the serious allegations in relation to it, the Government strongly share the view that a public inquiry needs to be established into all the circumstances surrounding this appalling murder." He said that we would do everything we could to advance this and we would pursue the request for a meeting with the Prime Minister.

Minister O'Donnell said that she had spoken in Geneva on the Finucane case. It was important that the Irish Government was publicly backing the campaign. Her Department had carried out a detailed analysis of the first British-Irish report which she found a frightening report.

Minister Cowen said that the family could be assured that he would bring the case up directly with Secretary of State Mandelson. It would be part of the agenda on an ongoing basis. Calling for a public inquiry was a serious statement of intent by the Government.

Minister O'Donnell clarified with Jane Winter that the first report of the British Irish Rights Watch had not been made public. This new report which contained a summary of the earlier report was being made public.

The Finucane family said that the support they had received from Congress had been magnificent and some Congressmen had taken these cases of the murder of lawyers very personally, particularly since Rosemary's murder, because they thought that if they highlighted the intimidation and threats against her, it would protect her. But the British had ignored all pressure from both Congress and UN so far.

The Taoiseach said that last year he had raised the Finucane case in his St. Patrick's Day meetings in Washington and he would do so again this year.

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