

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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The Finucanes' meeting with PM Blair

I spoke with Jane Winter (British-Irish Rights Watch) yesterday evening, immediately after the meeting of the Finucane family with Blair in Downing Street. In attendance were Geraldine Finucane (Pat's widow), their children - Michael, John and Katherine - Martin Finucane, Paul Mageean (CAJ), Peter Madden and Winter. Blair was accompanied by Jonathan Powell.

1. The meeting lasted over 50 minutes, much longer than the half-hour slot originally signaled to them by the Prime Minister's office. It was, at the start, a very disappointing meeting from the family's perspective, with Blair sticking rigidly to the line that an independent inquiry was not possible while the Stevens' investigation was ongoing.

2. Blair also said that it had been Mowlam's idea to call in Stevens in February 1999 [the Finucanes had understood that the RUC Chief Constable had made this decision unilaterally in order to block a public inquiry]. However, when pressed on this matter, Blair backtracked somewhat, saying "don't quote me on that". Powell also intervened to 'muddy the waters' on this point.

3. Winter thought that Blair was initially very dismissive of their case. He was also badly briefed and they were "appalled by his ignorance" of the details of the case. The Prime Minister also sought to distance himself and the current British Government from the case. In response, Geraldine Finucane said that the Labour Government had not created this problem but that, if they did not deal with it now in spite of all the evidence coming to light, then they too would be culpable. She also said that this issue was bigger than Pat Finucane, that an inquiry was needed to ensure that such actions by a seemingly-unaccountable arm of the British security forces would never be allowed to happen again.

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4. Mageean stressed that this was a matter of confidence for Nationalists - if they saw that those responsible for the murder of a leading member of their community were above the law, then they could have no confidence in that system of law - this was as much about the future as the past.

5. About half-way through the meeting, Blair "went off-brief" and began to engage seriously with the arguments put forward by the Finucane representatives. They drew heavily on the legal opinion prepared by *Amnesty International* to demonstrate that an inquiry could run concurrently with a police investigation. They also stressed the seriousness of this case and the negative impact it could have on the wider peace process.

6. Blair said he wanted to know the truth and that, if he found out that members of the security forces had targeted individuals for murder, then "they would be out of a job". The Finucanes were encouraged by his evident strength of feeling on this point.

7. At the end of the meeting, Blair agreed to examine the case again, in particular, the BIRW dossier "Deadly Intelligence". He also gave an undertaking to re-consider the question of ordering an inquiry while the Stevens investigation is ongoing.

Follow-up action

8. The family asked that the Taoiseach "re-inforce their message" and press the seriousness of this case during his contacts with the Prime Minister. They also expressed deep appreciation for the Taoiseach's assistance in arranging this meeting with the Prime Minister and in his ongoing interest in the Finucane case.

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