

Worthingtons Commercial, Belfast headed notepaper

Press Release

Embargoed until midnight Monday August 4, 2008.

Statement on behalf of Dr Marie Breen-Smyth in relation to Victims Commissioner appointment

Following the article in the Belfast Telegraph on Thursday 31 July 2008 'Woman to sue First Ministers over job', Dr Marie Breen-Smyth has confirmed through her solicitors, Worthingtons Commercial, Belfast, that she has instituted proceedings against the OFMDFM in the Office of Industrial Tribunal and Fair Employment Tribunal in relation to the failure to appoint her to the post of Commissioner for Victims and Survivors for Northern Ireland.

These proceedings state that the recruitment process was a sham, made without the necessary legislation in place for the position and that the appointments process breached equality and recruitment principles and procedures. The post of Victims Commissioner, was advertised on two occasions as a single post and Dr Breen-Smyth was one of six names 'deemed appointable' and presented to the First and Deputy First Minister on their taking up office, so that they could make an appointment. They elected not to do so, instead re-advertised the post, but brought the original six 'appointable' candidates into the final appointment process.

At the end of a protracted process, Dr Breen-Smyth was asked to consider an appointment as one of four Commissioners. She raised a series of concerns about this offer, which could be summarized as follows: that the post on offer to her did not exist, since the legislation called for the appointment of one, not four Commissioners; that the expenditure of public money on four salaries as opposed to one was unwarranted and the money would be better spent directly on victims; that there had been no consultation with victims about the appointment of four Commissioners; that appointing four people with identical job descriptions, no role definitions and no lines of accountability was organizationally inadvisable; that the appointment of four people compromised the independence of the role which was as a corporation sole; and that the appointment of four cast aspersions on candidates by implying that no one of them was able to deal fairly with both communities. She asked that these concerns were addressed before she responded to the OFMDFM offer. Instead, they decided to appoint someone else.

Dr Breen-Smyth denies turning down the offer of the post, and the OFMDFM confirms that a decision was taken to re-advertise the post despite Dr Smyth being considered by the selection panel in March 2007 to meet all the essential criteria for the post. Dr Breen-Smyth was never offered the post of Commissioner of Victims and Survivors for which she applied in January 2007 and December 2007 despite being deemed appointable at all stages of the recruitment process.

In the light of the current legal proceedings, no further information is available at this time.

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Notes to Editors

Background Information

Dr Marie Breen-Smyth is Director of the Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Contemporary Political Violence in Aberystwyth University, and a Reader in International Politics. In 1996 she established the Cost of the Troubles Study, the first comprehensive survey of the effects of the Troubles on the population of Northern Ireland. She has published three books on this subject, Northern Ireland's Troubles: The Human Costs (with Mike Morrissey and Marie-Therese Fay – now O'Hagan); Personal Accounts of Northern Ireland's Troubles: Public Chaos, Private Loss (with Marie-Therese Fay – now O'Hagan) and Northern Ireland After the Good Friday Agreement: Victims, Grievance and Blame (with Mike Morrissey). Her latest book (Truth and justice after violent conflict: managing violent pasts. Abingdon: Routledge, 2007) addresses the issue of dealing with the past after violent conflict. She remains involved in victims issues in Northern Ireland, and sits on the Board of Healing Through Remembering, and is a member of their sub-group on Truth Recovery and Acknowledgement.