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Opinion

Just let us do our job

Wednesday, January 16, 2008

Look beyond the flap about an amnesty, say Denis Bradley and Lord Eames, leaders of the Consultative Group on the Past, and judge us on our report...

No-one imagined that the task given to the Consultative Group on the Past would be easy. In fact, it faces immense and difficult challenges which are not just institutional but human.

It faces issues which question how our society can, if possible, find ways to move forward together while reflecting the basic human needs of sorrow, resentment, yearning for justice and truth, and vivid memories of the past.

After months of dialogue with organisations, victims groups, individual victims, political parties and many who live each day with their sense of loss and bereavement the Group is offering people, through our public consultation, the opportunity to give their views on the way forward.

While much attention has become focused on issues of the nature of the conflict as 'The Troubles' or 'the war' and issues about amnesty, those questions, among all the others, have been put to the Group even though they involve massive constitutional and legal questions.

However, equal attention could as easily have been given to the approach from victims and others. We have received suggestions from right across this society - and all those suggestions will be given careful and sensitive consideration before a report is prepared for next summer.

Those suggestions range from human needs of people who carry, in their hearts and minds, the scars of the Troubles, ways of supporting victims' groupings and ways of addressing the needs of those who have found no closure to their experiences of the past.

We have also heard the calls of those who have their personal definitions of what justice means, the needs of those who served the community through the security forces and the ongoing needs of a generation which is growing up since the violence ended.

All of this is a complex, sensitive and highly emotive field of differing emotions.

It goes beyond unionism or nationalism, victim or survivor.

It has to be emphasised and stated without reservation that the Group has yet to meet together to look at all the suggestions which have been put forward.

We are listening, engaging and treating all as equally as we can.

Any suggestions that 'an interim report' has been written or that the Group is adopting a particular political agenda, or that decisions have already been made, are completely untrue. Our real work will begin once the consultation is over.

The actual agenda for our work is being set by the people - not by any sectional interest, political philosophy or government department. We are determined to maintain our integrity as far as is humanly possible and in that we ask simply for the understanding of this community in the massive task we face.

We ask to be judged by our final recommendations in the summer and not by perceptions of our ongoing work.

The paramount desire of the Group is to make some contribution towards ensuring that 'it must never happen again' and that another generation should never have to endure the suffering of the past in Northern Ireland.

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