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Local & National

Amnesty for terrorists 'not ruled out'

Thursday, January 10, 2008

By Sam Lister

Downing Street last night moved to clarify comments by the Prime Minister which suggested he may rule out an amnesty for paramilitaries.

However, Downing Street later issued a statement claiming that it had not been ruled out.

Mr Brown was quizzed in the Commons yesterday afternoon on the proposal by the Eames/ Bradley consultative group, set up to deal with Ulster's violent past, that has sparked outrage among unionists and victims.

The DUP's Nigel Dodds called on him to stop any attempt to call the Troubles a "war" and prevent any amnesty being set up.

Mr Brown appeared to agree to the list of demands, but added it was important to "move forward" as he spoke at the first Prime Minister's Questions after the Christmas recess.

The confusion was sparked after the Prime Minister replied: "Yes, and I think it is important to say two things. First of all our respect for the security services, for the police and the armed forces, for the difficult job they did over many years and for the loss of life they had to suffer as a result of that difficult work that they did.

"Secondly to say that it is important to move forward with reconciliation and I think the efforts of reconciliation that are being made a number of bodies, including what he referred to, are an important element of building for the future - a secure, peaceful and prosperous Northern Ireland."

Speaking afterwards, Mr Dodds told the Belfast Telegraph he was taking the Prime Minister's words at face value.

He added: "We will wait to see how the Government plays this out.

"It is actions we need, not words."

However, Downing Street later issued a statement stating: "On this issue the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has said that nothing is ruled out and nothing is ruled in.

"The Prime Minister paid tribute to the gallant service of the security forces in Northern Ireland and his comments in no way change what the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland said."

The Consultative Group mooted the idea of an amnesty in return for participating in a truth recovery process on Monday.

The group, headed by Church of Ireland Primate Robin Eames and former priest Denis Bradley, has also suggested that the Government may be asked to formally say it fought a war against the IRA. However victims have branded the move a travesty.

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