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Some victims' groups 'help deepen divisions of past'

By Noel McAdam
Wednesday, 28 January 2009

Certain practices of some victims groups give rise to fears they are helping to deepen divisions, the report of the Consultative Group on the Past warned today.

The group said it is concerned that victims and survivors can be politicised to the point of being used to achieve political ends — and that some groups are “little more than mini political parties”.

The Eames Bradley team said a significant criticism of some groups is that they claim to represent more than they actually do, which can lead to misrepresenting the views of the people they claim to speak for.

The group said it is convinced the “already highly politicised” debate about the definition of a victim and the hierarchy of victimhood “is both fruitless and self-defeating”.

Regretting and rejecting what it terms “the politicisation of victimhood”, the report said the true nature of the hierarchy of victims lies in the level of loss and suffering experienced.

“It is the difference between having your loved one killed or severely injured against having a car destroyed or your house damaged,” the document said.

The team also said that as the conflict has ended, the transition from paramilitary control to “acceptable policing” has created a context in which anti-social behaviour has gone unchallenged.

Pin-pointing the responsibility of parents and community groups, the report said under the devolution of policing and justice more creative initiatives engaging with young people should be developed.

For young people one of the key messages of the conflict has been that life itself has little value, which some see as contributing to the high suicide rate now seen in the province.

The group also said it heard of a high rate of dependency on alcohol or drugs or both and a number of sources suggested that services for young people need to be co-ordinated and holistic.

Co-author Lord Eames said: “When we undertook this work we were under no illusions that it would be extremely difficult for our society to escape the dark shadows of the past. (We) set out a whole range of issues that will have to be addressed if we are to build the shared and reconciled future that we all want to see.

“At the heart of those proposals (are) justice, truth and importantly reconciliation... we have to find a way of moving to the future together. I would therefore ask everyone to take time to read our report.

“We would urge everyone to take the weeks and months ahead to reflect on its recommendations. This is too important an issue for instant responses.”

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