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## Local & National

### Defiant Flanagan comes out fighting

Former police chief defends his position

Tuesday, January 23, 2007

By Jonathan McCambridge and David Gordon

Former RUC Chief Constable Sir Ronnie Flanagan today dismissed calls for his resignation as the head of a UK-wide policing body as he prepared to come out fighting in the wake of Nuala O'Loan's devastating collusion report.

The Ombudsman yesterday reported on what she said was widespread collusion between police and UVF informers responsible for at least 10 murders - many of which occurred when Sir Ronnie was Chief Constable or head of Special Branch.

The report contained revelations that Special Branch agent Mark Haddock was protected from prosecution despite involvement in multiple murders - including those of Raymond McCord Jnr and Sharon McKenna.

Sir Ronnie, who now heads up Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC), is coming under increasing pressure in his new role. SDLP leader Mark Durkan said he has no option but to stand down.

Police Ombudsman Nuala O'Loan has already said that Sir Ronnie co-operated with her investigators in giving an interview, but that he had been unable to give answers to many questions because he could not remember the details.

The former chief constable holds two knighthoods and is very highly regarded by Government, not least for his role in the reform of policing in Northern Ireland.

When contacted by the Belfast Telegraph today, Sir Ronnie said he had been in meetings all day yesterday and was not aware of any specific criticism of him. He also said he was considering preparing a statement.

However, when confronted with calls for his resignation, his initial reaction was bullish.

"I am wondering how this has all come back to me. I co-operated with the Ombudsman and there is no criticism of me at all in her report. I see no grounds whatsoever for my resignation, but I do not want to get into an interview at this stage."

But SDLP leader Mark Durkan told the Belfast Telegraph that the Ombudsman's report had left Sir Ronnie with no option but to stand down from his position within HMIC.

He said: "He was the head of Special Branch and then the Chief Constable during the most serious episodes of collusion revealed by Nuala O'Loan. He was never a man who gave the impression of being remote or detached from what was going on in his organisation.






"Either he was not in control of a dysfunctional organisation, or he knew full well but kept the truth hidden. In either event, he should not head up the Inspectorate of Constabulary."

Speaking on Channel Four News last night, Secretary of State Peter Hain refused to confirm if Sir Ronnie would face further questions.

He added: "The Ombudsman is not ... pointing the figure particularly at Ronnie Flanagan ... obviously everybody concerned will have to account for their responsibilities and that will take a bit of time to work through.

"At the moment nobody's complaining about the way Ronnie Flanagan's doing his job as the chief inspector of Her Majesty's (Inspectorate of) Constabulary."

However, Raymond McCord snr, whose initial complaints into the UVF murder of his son sparked the Ombudsman probe, said that Sir Ronnie must stand down and he should also lose his knighthood.

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"The Chief Constable at the time was Ronnie Flanagan. As far as I'm concerned Ronnie Flanagan has a lot to answer for."

Victims group Relatives for Justice revealed they are consulting legal advisers on taking civil proceedings against the former Chief Constable.

Ironically, the UK-wide policing body headed by Sir Ronnie is to conduct a key review of the PSNI's running of informers in the wake of the O'Loan investigation.

The Ombudsman recommended in her report that Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary (HMIC) should conduct an inspection of new "PSNI processes for informant handling, controlling and management".

Mrs O'Loan's report stated that this recommendation had been accepted by HMIC.

The aim of the inspection will be to identify any legal or administrative changes needed to ensure the effective handling of informers within terrorist networks.

It has been proposed by the Ombudsman in the light of the forthcoming transfer of national security matters to MI5 from the PSNI.

Meanwhile, Mr McCord today announced plans to stand in the Assembly election.

"I will be running as a victims' candidate with support from other victims' families. One of my main aims will be to expose the hypocrisy of unionist politicians who have done nothing for my family and are in denial over the collusion exposed in the Ombudsman's report," he said.

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