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Victim's family brand appeal a 'PR stunt'

North Belfast News

By Ciarán Barnes

19/01/2007

A fresh PSNI appeal into the murder of a Catholic taxi driver by UVF police informants has been branded a "PR stunt" by the victim's family.

Bawnmore woman Sharon McKenna was shot dead at the Shore Road home of an elderly Protestant friend in January 1993. Her 14th anniversary occurred on Wednesday.

The PSNI used the date to launch a fresh appeal for information on her death.

However, the move has been criticised by the McKenna family who believe it is designed to deflect attention away from the publication of a Police Ombudsman report into her death on Monday.

From Front

The report will say that Ms McKenna was murdered by Special Branch informants operating within the Mount Vernon UVF.

It will also find that despite confessing to the killing one of the agents, Mark Haddock, was protected from prosecution by his handlers.

The McKenna family yesterday criticised the joint PSNI and Historical Enquiries Team (HET) appeal.

They asked what was the point in police seeking new information when they failed to act on a confession from one of the gunmen involved.

"The family see this as a PR exercise and an attempt to deflect criticism or fallout from Monday's report by the ombudsman," said solicitor Paddy Murray, who represents the McKenna family.

At a press conference on Wednesday, Detective Inspector Ken Armstrong and the HET's Dave Cox denied the appeal was a "cosmetic exercise".

They confirmed they would be investigating whether evidence available at the time was not acted upon and vowed to charge any police officers involved in covering up the murder.

Ms McKenna was blasted in the back by Mark Haddock at her friend's house near Seaview football ground.

Haddock and a second gunman had earlier been given shotguns at a flat on the Shore Road and told to kill the 27-year-old.



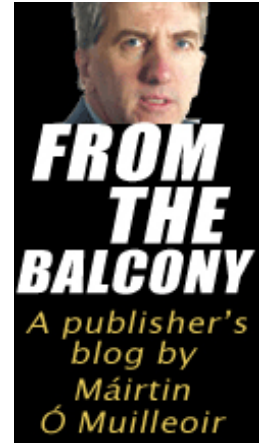
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They were picked up and taken to the murder scene in a blue Vauxhall Cavalier hijacked on Glasgow Street earlier that day. The vehicle was later found abandoned on Seaview Drive.

The day after the murder a remorseful Haddock admitted to RUC detectives Jonty Brown and Trevor McIlwrath that he had killed Ms McKenna. The confession took place in a car under Arthur's Bridge.

The cops wanted to charge him, but say they were blocked from doing so by Haddock's Special Branch handlers.

The UVF man went on to command the organisation's Mount Vernon Unit. His name has been linked to more than a dozen murders.

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