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Donaldson vow to families of shot civilians

By Barry McCaffrey

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THE families of 11 unarmed civilians shot dead by the British army in disputed circumstances are to meet the DUP leadership.

The 11 victims, including a Catholic priest, were shot dead by British army soldiers in the greater Ballymurphy area of west Belfast in a three-day period in August 1971.

Fr Hugh Mullan and Frank Quinn (19) were shot dead by soldiers as they went to help a wounded man.

Mother-of-eight Joan Connolly (50) was shot dead by soldiers as she searched for her children outside the Henry Taggart barracks.

Later that night Noel Philips (20) and father-of-10 Daniel Teggart (44) were shot dead by soldiers from the same building.

Father-of-nine Joe Murphy died two weeks later after being shot outside the same barracks.

The following day 28-year-old Edward Doherty and John Laverty (20) were shot dead by soldiers in separate incidents in Ballymurphy.

Joseph Corr (43) died 16 days later after being shot by soldiers near his Divismore Crescent home.

On August 11 youth worker Paddy McCarthy (44) collapsed and died from a heart attack following a confrontation with soldiers.

Father-of-two John McKerr (49) was shot as he left Corpus Christi Church, which he had been repairing. He died nine days later.

All of the dead were unarmed and were not members of any paramilitary organisation.

A number of the killings were later used by the Irish government when it took the British government to the European Court of Human Rights.

In 2007 the Ballymurphy families began a campaign through the Relatives For Justice victims group for the British government to apologise for the killings of their loved ones.

The families believe their campaign took a major step forward yesterday following a meeting with DUP junior minister Jeffrey Donaldson.

Speaking after the meeting Daniel Teggart's son John said: "It was a very positive and productive meeting. Mr Donaldson listened carefully as we outlined how our loved ones were killed. He promised us his support and wants us to go to Stormont to meet with the DUP's executive.

"We feel this is a very important step forward in people from different traditions understanding the suffering felt on both sides."

Speaking yesterday, Mr Donaldson said: "I listened very carefully to what the families had to say and will be reporting back to my party officers in the context of considering how we deal with the issue of victims.

"I look forward to having further meetings with the families."

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