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'Issue of state collusion must be addressed once and for all'

(Catherine Morrison, [Irish News](#))

It has been described as "the elephant in the room" at this week's talks but who is representing the thousands of people who lost loved ones during and after the Troubles? Catherine Morrison reports

A cross-community delegation of victims' families is demanding that the issue of victims is put on the agenda at today's (Wednesday) make-or-break talks in St Andrews.

They have called for a meeting with representatives of all political parties as soon as they return to Belfast to discuss policing and justice, which are set to be the key tests of this week's negotiations.

Mark Thompson, of the pressure group Relatives for Justice, said many of those who lost loved ones feel they are being "pushed into a corner" by those in power.

And with policing looking set to become the key issue of the talks, he said many of those whose relatives were murdered by or with the help of agents run by the security forces feel they should be consulted about the issue.

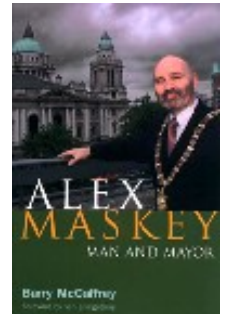
Mr Thompson said the issue of collusion must be addressed "once and for all".

"If they don't deal with this now, they'll be in Scotland or somewhere else in four years' time," he said.

"If you are going to have a political agreement, you can't not talk about the elephant in the room.

"People were denied the truth and then you have a government which says well, we'll bring the two bad guys into the room - republicans and loyalists - but the reality was that the state was the bad guy as well."

Raymond McCord, whose son Raymond was murdered by the UVF in November 1997, said unionist politicians have avoided facing the truth about policing and collusion between the security forces and loyalist death squads.



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Mr McCord's claims that an RUC Special Branch informant was involved in his son's murder are being investigated by Police Ombudsman Nuala O'Loan. The report is due out later this year.

"All the issues that are going to dominate these talks concern policing," he said.

"The DUP can't point the finger at Sinn Féin about policing when they have let policing issues be conducted in the way they are in this country, with collusion. Ian Paisley has avoided the issue himself, never mind Gerry Adams."

John Allen, whose son John (31) was shot dead at his flat in Ballyclare, Co Antrim, in November 2003 by the UVF, is considering asking the Police Ombudsman Nuala O'Loan to intervene in his son's case.

Mr Allen has accused police of turning a blind eye to the activities of the UVF in the Ballyclare area in order to protect an informer.

Mark Sykes was injured in the UVF attack on the Sean Graham bookmakers on the Ormeau Road in south Belfast in February 1992. His brother-in-law Peter Magee (18) was killed. Mr Sykes will be travelling over to Scotland to lobby the parties and governments to put victims at the top of their agenda.

Mr Sykes said the British government had "underestimated" the families of murdered loved ones.

"They think the longer this goes on, that we will go away," he said. "They underestimate the families of loved ones who have been killed because we owe it to them. If you do nothing then their memory is forgotten, but if you do something about it, then at least you can say to yourself and your family, 'I've done my best'."

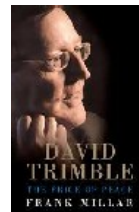
October 12, 2006

This article appeared first in the October 11, 2006 edition of the [Irish News](#).

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