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Wednesday, October 22, 2008

# NI truth process will not include amnesty

RENAGH HOLOHAN in Newcastle upon Tyne

THERE WILL be no amnesty for those giving information to the Consultative Group on the Past, the body's co-chairmen Lord Eames and Denis Bradley told parliamentarians here yesterday.

The two men addressed backbenchers at a closed session of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly on their work to date, and on issues raised by communities in the North as they investigate ways of helping victims of the Troubles.

Media reports that those giving information to a truth recovery process investigating unsolved murders would be free from the threat of prosecution were untrue, the men told Assembly members.

Their assurances were welcomed by several parliamentarians including the SDLP's Alasdair McDonnell and the DUP's Jim Wells. Others spoke of the huge and emotional task Lord Eames and Mr Bradley faced in confronting the past and emphasised the enormous care and consideration needed in trying to assist bereaved families. Some spoke of the necessity to avoid a judicial/adversarial approach in favour of a reconciliatory route.

The co-chair of the assembly Peter Hain MP said everyone was very moved by the two men's emotional and philosophical presentation, considering the depth of the problem they were addressing.

As he left yesterday's meeting, Lord Eames said he and Mr Bradley had outlined the range of issues, including legal ones, which the victims had raised during their consultations and what they would recommend in the move towards a new society in Northern Ireland.

Lord Eames told reporters that reports this week that limited immunity would be offered to paramilitaries who gave information had been unhelpful. His consultative group hoped to report before Christmas, and leaks only gave one snippet of the whole pattern and it could be wrong.

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"We can understand the emotion, it is raw and it hurts out there. Nobody needs to tell me in my career about the hurt of families who have lost loved ones during the Troubles. But they are only seeing part of the package, part of the proposal that we want to make," he said.

"We have been very, very sensitive, we have been from the beginning, for the hurt and the memories of all those people out there."

The Church of Ireland Primate Archbishop Alan Harper said yesterday the Eames/Bradley report would "undoubtedly, make uncomfortable reading for everyone in Northern Ireland".

In a presidential address to the Armagh Diocesan Synod, he said: "The issue of how we move on as a community in both parts of Ireland, but especially in Northern Ireland, is a matter of crucial importance. Dealing with the past is a central component of the issue . . . It is important that the churches make their contribution to the shaping of a new future. However, we also require from Government a renewal of focused attention to the task of moving the whole community forward.

"However, if the Executive continues to fail to meet, my fear is that the vacuum so created, and the sharpness of the issues that remain unaddressed, will permit malign or extreme influences to gain ever more ground".

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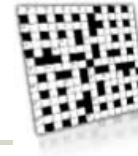


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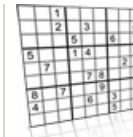
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