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Eames and Bradley group to address legacy of Troubles

Lord Robin Eames and Denis Bradley are to head an independent consultative group to examine the best way to deal with the legacy of the Troubles, writes **Dan Keenan**, Northern News Editor

The announcement was made by Northern Secretary Peter Hain. He stressed that the British government would adopt a hands-off approach.

"The government cannot tell the people of Northern Ireland how they should deal with the past," he said. "Only the people themselves can try to answer that question."

Lord Eames said the group wanted to "hear the voices of those who have stories to tell". He believed such an initiative would have been impossible without the successful setting up of a powersharing Executive at Stormont last month. This "would provide a fair wind" to the group's efforts to find a consensus on the next steps.

The group, led by the former Anglican archbishop of Armagh and the first vice-chairman of the policing board, includes six representatives broadly representative of society.

They include David Porter of the group Contemporary Christianity; Prof James Mackey of Queen's University; the Rev Lesley Carroll from Fortwilliam Presbyterian church in north Belfast; former rugby international Willie John McBride; Elaine Moore of the Drug and Alcohol Northlands Centre at Magilligan in Co Derry; and former Armagh senior football captain and now BBC pundit Jarlath Burns.

Lord Eames and Mr Bradley told The Irish Times last night in Belfast, that they approach their "daunting" task with open minds and no pre-set ideas as to how "the past" should be dealt with.

The task presented great difficulties, Mr Bradley said, but the new group would work to complement those already engaged in facing up to the legacy of the Troubles, including the tribunals of inquiry, the Police Ombudsman and the police Historical Enquiries Team, which is investigating thousands of unsolved crimes since 1969. "There are a lot of hurting people out there and

there are a great many unheard people too," he said.

"Can we do it, can we find any consensus on this by the end of a year? Who knows?" Relatives of the Disappeared, those secretly killed during the conflict and whose bodies have never been recovered, marked yesterday's Day of Reflection at the residence of the US consul in Belfast with a call for information on the whereabouts of the remains. Some 30 relatives released doves of peace amid fresh appeals for political leaders to help return the bodies.

Sinn Féin said it was committed to helping them. Assembly member Francie Molloy said: "It is also important that there is the collective political will to move forward across a range of these issues; about how we deal with the past and how we ensure that the rights of many of the victims and survivors of the conflict are centre stage."

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