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Raft of proposals to address Troubles

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DAN KEENAN, Northern News Editor

REPORT FINDINGS: THE REPORT of the Consultative Group on the Past contains 31 recommendations designed to address the legacy of the Troubles.

Chief among them are the establishment of a legacy commission, a reconciliation forum, an independent unit to deal with unsolved killings, an annual day of reflection and reconciliation and a payment of £12,000 to the nearest surviving relative of anyone killed in the conflict in Britain or Northern Ireland.

The report recommends an end to independent judicial inquiries, and a five-year timescale for the work of a commission. The independent commission would combine issues linked to the history of the Troubles with reconciliation, justice and information recovery.

"It would have the overarching objective of promoting peace and stability in Northern Ireland," the report suggests. This initiative alone would command £100 million in funding.

The reconciliation forum would be established under the auspices of the commission to address what it calls "society issues" relating to the conflict.

The leaders of the consultative group, Lord Eames and Denis Bradley, said the £12,000 payment to bereaved family members was based on a similar Irish Government policy.

The consultative group has cast this initiative as an attempt to show each bereaved family that the state acknowledges their loss. The group insists it should not be viewed as any form of compensation, nor is it intended to demonstrate any degree of moral equivalence between those involved in the conflict and victims who were innocently caught up in it.

Further proposals call for fresh attention to be given to the bereaved and their need for funding, healthcare and compensation. Extra attention should be given to services to

address trauma, suicide, depression and addiction, the report says.

The commission should have an international commissioner aided by two others. Its central objectives would be to help society “towards a shared and reconciled future”, to review and investigate “historical cases”, conduct a process of “information recovery” and examine linked cases emerging from the conflict.

The report stresses the need for measures to challenge the persistence of sectarianism and links this to a call to promote “remembering activities”. Those exiled by paramilitaries should also be given assistance to return.

The main churches would be asked to “review and rethink their contribution to a non-sectarian future” and in particular to examine their role in education.

The group wants a new independent unit which would examine unsolved killings, taking over this remit from the Historical Inquiries Team and the Police Ombudsman.

Work will also be done to address persistent claims of collusion between state agencies and paramilitary and other groups.

The group insists there should be no general amnesty, but adds there should be “recommendations on how a line might be drawn at the end of its five-year mandate so that Northern Ireland might best move to a shared future”.

The group proposes an annual Day of Reflection and Reconciliation with a key input by the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. The proposals conclude with a call for political parties and “whatever remnant or manifestation of paramilitary groups remain” to sign a formal declaration that never again will violence be used to further political objectives. The final recommendation details a call for a physical memorial to be considered.

Group members

CO-CHAIRS

Lord (Robin) Eames: Former Church of Ireland primate.

Denis Bradley: A former Catholic priest, he was the first vice-chairman of the Policing Board.

GROUP MEMBERS:

Willie John McBride: Former Irish rugby international and Lions captain who had a long career with the Northern Bank.

Jarlath Burns: Secondary school vice-principal and former captain of the Armagh senior Gaelic football team.

Lesley Carroll: Minister at Fortwilliam and Macrory Presbyterian Church in north Belfast and a member of the Presbyterian Church’s General Board.

James Mackey: retired lecturer in philosophy and a professor of theology.

Elaine Moore: Addiction counsellor with Northlands Drugs and Alcohol Project working mostly at Magilligan prison.

David Porter: Canon Director for Reconciliation Ministry at Coventry Cathedral and co-founder of Evangelical Contribution on Northern Ireland.

INTERNATIONAL ADVISERS:

Martti Ahtisaari: Nobel Peace Prize winner and former president of Finland. He was an independent inspector for the decommissioning of paramilitary weapons in Northern Ireland.

Brian Currin: Attorney who served on South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Committee.

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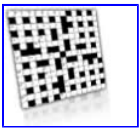
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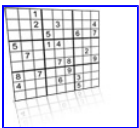
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