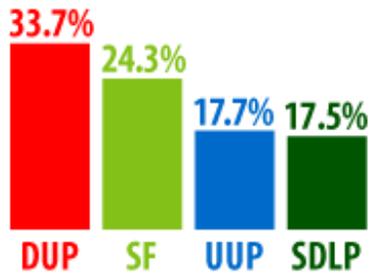


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DONALDSON ADDRESSES STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE VICTIMS & SURVIVORS ORDER

DUP MP for Lagan Valley Jeffrey Donaldson has addressed the Standing Committee on the Victims and Survivors Order. Paying tribute to the work of the Interim Commissioner in promoting the needs of victims Mr Donaldson stressed that the innocent victims should not be classified alongside the perpetrators of violence. He also highlighted the need for victims to receive adequate financial compensation. Speaking at Westminster today Mr Donaldson said,



"Throughout the political process and especially under the Belfast Agreement, the interests and concerns of the innocent victims of terrorist violence were largely ignored. The early release of terrorist killers and the demise of the Royal Ulster Constabulary in particular rubbed salt into the already open wounds of victims and their loved ones. My Party has given a firm commitment that we will not let the case of victims be forgotten and we will honour that commitment fully.

My Party does not support the view often put forward that those who were engaged in terrorism can be classified alongside innocent victims. This issue of definition is fundamental to all of the work with victims. There are many people in the community who suffered at the hands of terrorists who become excluded when former paramilitaries are placed alongside them as 'victims'.

This issue of definition is key to the work of the Victims Commissioner as laid out in the Victims and Survivors Order. It states that the Commissioner is to work with victims and survivors of 'conflict related incidents'. There should be a tighter definition introduced for the work of the Commissioner, particularly if we are to ensure that innocent victims of terrorism do not become excluded from this work, as many innocent victims may not feel able to become fully included in the work of the Commissioner if the role is to encompass work with former paramilitaries.

Much of the alienation, which has been experienced by many victims and the groups who represent them, is caused due to ex-prisoners groups being included within the same category for funding as groups representing innocent victims.

The Interim Commissioner has already carried out much good work and we would like to see that continued and built upon. The report, which was recently published by the Commissioner, highlighted the real need for long-term funding to be secured by the Victims sector. I am glad that in this House last week the Prime Minister was able to give that commitment and I welcome that financial support, which will be forthcoming for victims in Northern Ireland for the longer term.

There is also an equal requirement to ensure that individual victims receive adequate financial support to meet their particular needs. Too often, the innocent victims of terrorist violence received inadequate amounts of compensation from the Government. Over the years they have struggled to make

ends meet and to raise families in the most difficult circumstances. It is long past time that the Government put right this particular injustice. The Minister and his colleagues must work closely with the Victims Commissioner to ensure that there is greater flexibility and generosity when assessing and meeting the needs of individual victims and their families."

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