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DURKAN - LEGACY PROPOSALS MUST BE VICTIM-CENTRED

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SDLP Leader and Foyle MP Mark Durkan MLA has said that whilst we must be careful about singling out one aspect of the Eames/Bradley 'legacy of our past' report – namely a possible amnesty for former paramilitaries, security forces or other protagonists of the 'troubles' – any future proposals should be 'victim-centred' and not about fixing things for the 'victim-makers.'

Mr. Durkan said: “We have to be careful about jumping in on what might be one aspect of the report from Lord Eames and Denis Bradley.

“However, what we do need is something that is victim-centred, something that addresses the needs that different victims have in terms of truth, in terms of recognition and in terms of remembrance, and it has to be something that addresses all of these needs.

“The proposals have to be about meeting the needs of victims and wider society, not just about fixing things for those who have made people victims in the first place – whether those were paramilitaries, from the security forces or elsewhere.

“The last time we had proposals that were centred on an amnesty-style approach was when we had the Northern Ireland Offences Bill. Yet, victims groups, and not just victims of paramilitaries, were rightly disgusted at that approach. This was because it pretended to get closure, but this closure was not for the victims themselves, it was actually for the victim-makers.

“Importantly, the lessons need to be learnt from that flawed approach.

“In relation to whether we should have an amnesty or not, I would question what would be the purposes of such a proposed amnesty? If it was to give victims what they need – a better chance of finding out the truth about what happened to them and their loved ones, and would remove any excuse or any inhibition from those who possess the truth from coming forward and sharing that to the comfort of victims – then I would agree to that.”

Mr. Durkan added: “However, when we talk of an amnesty, we should not only be concerned with paramilitaries. There were many people who were made victims by the security forces and those who were responsible for security policy. Indeed, there are many people in the security and intelligence services who were actually complicit in what paramilitaries did and who allowed paramilitaries to do what they did.

“It might well be that if we are to give our wider society the truth of all of that, and if we are to give victims who have suffocated in frustration the comfort of at least finding out the truth about what actually happened, it might well be that some form of an amnesty could have a role to play in removing the excuses from those who, thus far, have failed to provide that truth.”

ENDS

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