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A Better Way to a Better Ireland ”



## GOVT MUST TACKLE MISTRUST AMONG VICTIMS

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### ASSEMBLY SPEECH - DOLORES KELLY

**Motion:** That this Assembly urges the Executive to implement the recommendations of the final report by the Interim Commissioner for Victims and Survivors, entitled ‘Support for Victims and Survivors: Addressing the Human Legacy’.

**SDLP amendment:** At end insert: and further urges the establishment of a Victims’ and Survivors’ Forum.’

“Deputy Speaker, despite the controversial manner in which Bertha McDougal was appointed Victims’ Commissioner, which not only did her an injustice but called into serious question the whole public appointments process, fact Bertha McDougall performed her duties creditably and with a great deal of sensitivity.

The Interim Commissioner was right in her assessment of the Troubles, when she said that:

“The real cost needs to be considered within the context of human suffering and the physical, emotional and psychological trauma inflicted on individuals and society as a whole.”

This may seem self-evident; in fact, until 1997 the British Government never dealt with the Troubles in any way other than financial compensation. This could hardly be considered adequate, or surprising. Especially given that our hospitals and roads were falling further and further behind the standard set in Great Britain.

There was no official recognition of the victims’ family experiences; of the child too young to remember the loss of a father, of the devastating impact of the loss of a son, of the people too traumatised to work again and unable to pay the mortgage.

It was only through dogged persistence among the community and voluntary sector that Government ever took heed of the needs of victims. We have them to thank for where we have got to today. Politicians did not take the first steps – now is the time to make amends.

In her report, the Commissioner adopted a ‘needs-based’ approach, which deftly allowed her to avoid creating priorities or perceived alignments. It also allowed her to create a report which can be welcomed by all those in the house today. To oppose it, would be to oppose any further discussion of a Fund for UDR Widows. It would also be to oppose the improvement of mental health provision for all of our children. The report draws attention to trans-generational Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Identification and diagnosis of this will be essential if the North is to succeed. We can create a stable peace, but the next generation must not be left with mental scarring that would prevent them from maintaining it. And this will require a coordinated and comprehensive response from Government, right to the border regions.

Another problem identified by the Commissioner was that services at the moment tend to be centred towards Belfast. I welcome her commitment to Outreach, and to decentralising the whole issue of conflict transformation. The issue was not born in Belfast, and it will not rest there alone. Those victims in rural areas have specific needs that must be addressed. Not just soaked up into promises of better public transport.

Dealing with the needs of victims can sometimes be viewed as dealing with our societal needs. For example, Government needs to learn how to tackle mistrust among victims, but in doing so, it will gain favour from all of us here. Both sides feel the other to be better treated in this area – coordinated information and a cross-community approach should therefore help the rest of society. It will also create models of Best Practice to be applied elsewhere.”

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