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KELLY: SORT OUT VICTIMS' ISSUES IN 2009

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SDLP Spokesperson on victims' issues Dolores Kelly MLA said the First Ministers should put a high priority on dealing with the past and putting appropriate measures in place to deal with victims' issues in 2009.

She said: “The Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister has allowed a shameful backlog of unresolved issues to pile up and none is more shameful than their failure to deal properly with the past in general and victims in particular. It is particularly shameful that the First Ministers have allowed people who have suffered so much for years and even decades to get caught up in party-political tussles between Sinn Fein and the DUP. It is time for them to sort it all out.

“We are now to have three bodies – a Victims' Forum, a Victims' Commission which has grown from one commissioner to four, and a Victims' Service, which will be under OFMDFM control. The division of labour between them is unclear, so there is a danger of duplication and bureaucracy. It is particularly worrying that the commissioners were not even consulted about the Victims' Service which is under OFMDFM control. There must be no attempts by OFMDFM to control or steer the work of the Commissioners, who must be given enough latitude and resources to allow the voices of victims and survivors to be heard at all levels of Government

“We need to know how the Victims' Service will work, whether it will incorporate existing work done by bodies such as the Trauma Advisory Panel, the Memorial Fund and the Community Relations Council, or whether the whole thing will be contracted out somewhere.

“OFMDFM also needs to place these measures for victims firmly in the context of the whole task of dealing with the past, including the Eames/Bradley process.

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“It is clear that OFMDFM have much work to do to gain any kind of confidence amongst victims and survivors after the tortured and farcical process in which they went about appointing a victims commission, followed by a five-month shutdown of the Executive.”

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