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No turning back for truth campaign - Adams

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Speech by Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams MP MLA at the March for Truth rally at Belfast City Hall, Sunday March 12th.

"I want to begin by welcoming you all here today to Belfast City Hall.

I also want to commend and thank everyone who has been involved in the various Fleadhs, Féiles and Festivals throughout Belfast and other areas.

Ba mhaith liom fáilte a chur roimh achan duine anseo inniu, go hairithe na hiospartaigh agus a gclann. Tá sé soiléir go bhfuil tacaíocht láidir ann don fheachtas seo mar thoradh an tslua mór atá anseo.

Táimid ag lorg an fhirinne, ceartas agus bail chothrom a chinntiú do na hiospartaigh agus na marthanóirí uilig.

Nil ann dul siar ann.

I want to say a special word of thanks and commendation comhairgdeas to all of those who have worked tirelessly over recent weeks to organise this march and rally.

They have done a remarkable job of work as evidenced in the numbers of people who turned out along the route and those of you here in front of the City Hall.

I want to especially welcome all of you, the victims, and the families of those victims bereaved directly by British state forces and indirectly by them as a consequence of their collusion with unionist death squads in the murder of citizens.

In that context I think it is right and appropriate that we remember today John Downes, a young man of 23 who was killed by an RUC plastic bullet in an attack on this march, on this day in 1984.

I measc laochra na gael go raibh a anam agus táim ag smaoineadh ar Brenda ar an lá seo

The objective of this march and rally is to draw attention to collusion and British state violence; a policy which resulted in many thousands of victims

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who were killed or injured or bereaved; and the administrative and institutional cover-up by the British government and its state agencies.

The black ribbon is the symbol of this event. Wearing it today is an act of solidarity with the victims, their families and the campaign groups.

Caith an ribin chun an dlúthpháirtíocht a dhaingniú leis na hiospartaigh agus a gclainne.

It also sends a clear message to the British state that we are determined to pursue the Truth.

We are determined to campaign even though it may take a long time, until the British state acknowledges its administrative and institutional use of state violence and collusion.

The reality of course is that everyone knows that these tactics were employed by the British.

In quiet moments British Ministers will privately admit some of this.

You the families, and the people who suffered directly from it know the truth.

But the British government has never acknowledged it.

On the contrary they have employed the full weight of their political influence and authority to deny, cover-up and suppress the truth.

The extent of this cover-up is breath taking.

Collusion and shoot-to-kill and torture were integral of the very fabric of the British systems political and counter-insurgency strategy.

To list today all of the countless examples of shoot-to-kill operations, plastic bullet deaths and of collusion would be impossible.

There are too simply too many.

It is also argued by some that because the British had agents in the IRA that there was republican collusion.

Yes the British recruited, blackmailed, tricked, intimidated and bribed individual republicans into working for them and I think it would be only right to have this dimension of British strategy investigated also.

If the British state used former republicans to do its killing for it then the victims of that policy have the right to truth also.

The infiltration of organisations, the tactics of divide and conquer, of counter gangs, has long been a hallmark of British policy.

But to compare, as anti-republicans do, this policy with the structured control and direction of unionist paramilitaries in the conduct of their war is disingenuous.

However both strategies have a number of things in common.

They were about the defeat of republicanism. And they failed.

That objective has not been achieved. And it never will be.

On the contrary Irish republicanism has defeated British militarism, and you, the people gathered here can take great heart from that reality and from your part in that endeavour.

Republicanism is now stronger than it has been for almost a century.

And genuine republicanism which is about the unity of Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter will continue to grow stronger in the time ahead, and through completely peaceful and democratic and political means.

That is our message today.

We will never turn back.

It is not my intention to take us through the last 38 years of the British military campaign.

This ended only at the end of last month.

It also ended in failure.

The deployment of British troops was to uphold the status quo.

That status quo has changed and will continue to change, irreversibly in the time ahead.

So, however British military apologists seek to defend their role in Ireland it is totally and absolutely indefensible.

And it is because of that reality there is a refusal to acknowledge the actions which it carried out.

But if there is to be an inclusive healing process and a genuine process of reconciliation then the British government must face up to its responsibilities.

I know why the British government is reluctant to do this but it perplexes me that unionist politicians are so opposed to such a course.

It is in the interest of all our people that there is a genuine and successful healing process.

All political leaders have a responsibility to promote this.

That means thinking beyond any sectarian, sectional, party political or self interest.

Republicans have clearly acknowledged many times the hurt they inflicted during the conflict.

I have expressed my personal and sincere regret and apologised for that hurt. I do so again today.

The IRA has also acknowledged what it has done. That is the right and proper

thing to do.

The IRA has apologised to all those non-combatants it killed or injured and their families.

Are victims of the other combatant forces not entitled to the same respect and consideration?

The British government has a legal and moral responsibility to acknowledge to you what its forces and system did to you and your families.

The Irish government has a constitutional, legal and moral responsibility to actively promote this course of action.

Every citizen has the right to be treated with respect and dignity.

That is your birthright.

There must be no hierarchy of victims and an end to the demonising of victims, of victims families and victims groups.

This week at a Féile an Phobal event I listened to the harrowing stories told by the families of those killed in Ballymurphy around this time in the aftermath of internment.

11 people were killed in that small district.

Caith an ribín chun an dlúthpháirtíocht a dhaingniú leis na hiospartaigh agus a gclainne.

As family members, friends and neighbours told their sad tale I noticed that there were no TV cameras in the room to witness and record what was being said.

There was no BBC, or UTV or RTE.

The media has a huge responsibility to shine a light on these events.

It hasn't done that in the past. Sections of the media carried British Army or RUC statements and claims as fact.

Sectarian killings of Catholics were routinely described as apparently motiveless murders.

So even now years later the sections of the media involved need to be objective.

There is a responsibility to be balanced and fair in how all these matters are dealt with.

For example, one cannot imagine the newsrooms talking about RUC terrorists or British Army terrorists or UDR terrorists. If the media is really to be impartial then it should not refer to IRA terrorists either.

The fact is that the families of IRA volunteers who were killed in the war are due as much compassion and respect as the families of British soldiers or other fallen combatants.

It has also been said by our opponents that Sinn Féin should not be raising these issues.

We are accused of hypocrisy; of raking over the past.

We are told we should let things be.

It is my very firm view that republicans need to deal with all of these matters in a very sensitive way.

This isn't about point scoring.

It's up to us to persuade others that it's also in their interests to have the issue of collusion and state killings dealt with.

Brushing it under the carpet, revising our history to exorcise the role of the British state in fomenting and prolonging conflict in our country, is in no one's interest.

Sinn Féin has a mandate freely given by hundreds of thousands of people across this island and we will use that mandate in support of victims and their families.

The Irish government also has a responsibility to assert and actively promote the rights of victims, including victims of collusion and British state violence here and in its own jurisdiction.

At Weston Park both governments gave a commitment to hold public inquiries. They have not kept these commitments.

It is little wonder that the families involved are frustrated.

So, how can an acceptable process be achieved?

In my view any process of truth recovery must be victim centred and therapeutic.

Sinn Féin is not being prescriptive.

We are not attached to any particular model at this time.

There are clearly certain values and principles involved.

For example, and as I have just said, any process should be victim centred.

There can be no hierarchy of victimhood.

The British government cannot set up such a process.

Caithfear a bheith neamhspleách le cothrom na bhfirinne do na hiospartaigh.

It must be independent.

One way of achieving independence is to have an international inquiry.

The United Nations or another reputable agency must be involved.

One of the objectives of such an independent, international process would be to agree protocols and modalities which all relevant parties could sign up for.

All of this must be conducted in a sensitive and generous way and those of us in political leadership must approach all of the issues involved with humility and honesty.

I know that many of the victims groups are looking at a proposition for an Independent, International Truth Commission and I have met with some of them on this.

I think there is merit in this idea. Our party will wait until the groups and families involved have concluded their deliberations before coming to our own decisions on this matter.

I want to stress that our concern is for all victims.

And this is important to us, especially in this phase of our struggle which is about nation building.

Ag tógail pobail agus ag tógail Éire an chomhionannas, tá a fhios agam nach mbeidh aon dul siar ann.

Building a united harmonious society demands that these difficult issues are dealt with in an inclusive way as a necessary part of putting the past behind us.

Looking after victims and victims' families and survivors is part of this.

This includes ensuring that compensation is available to everyone involved on the basis of equality.

That some sections are given special treatment while others are ignored is downright unfair.

An American President Abraham Lincoln seeking to tackle this difficult issue after five years of bloody civil war in that country sought to reach out to both sides in his second inaugural speech:

With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations.

So, my friends thank you for all your work.

Go raibh maith agaibh, leantar den fheachtas agus ní neart go cur le chéile.

Thanks especially for never giving up.

There is only one way to go and that is forward.

Be assured we are going forward.

We will never turn back." ENDS

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