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Politics

Talks held over unsolved murders

Thursday, June 21, 2007

By Noel McAdam

Ian Paisley and Martin McGuinness have held face-to-face talks about unsolved murders during the Troubles including the Disappeared and the death of Robert McCartney, it was revealed yesterday.

First Minister Mr Paisley said he had made "strong representations" to the Deputy First Minister and Sinn Fein President Gerry Adams.

Mr McGuinness reiterated that he wanted anyone with information on such incidents to come forward.

"We don't sit back and not speak frankly and fully," Mr Paisley told a Stormont committee, "because we cannot hide away from these issues."

In a low key but business-like hour-long session, the DUP leader said there remained some 200 murders "that there is no answer to" and, while money might prove a difficulty, the Executive would seek to find adequate funding for victims and the need to deal with the past. Mr McGuinness said conflict and violence had left a profound legacy not just for victims but damaging relations right across society, yet there was no place for sectarianism, intolerance and racism.

The co-equal Deputy First Minister also revealed that they will announce the new Victims and Survivors Commissioner, to replace Bertha McDougall, before the Assembly rises for the summer in the first week of July.

Mr Paisley said the appointment had not been as easy as might have been thought and said the devolved government would avoid the litigation brought against Secretary of State Peter Hain over his appointment procedures.

"Certain decisions cost litigation against them so we don't intend to get into that. We intend to get a good clean job and make it easy for the first appointment not to have to carry any baggage with them," Mr Paisley said.

Ways and mechanisms for dealing with the legacy of the past, including collusion between loyalist paramilitaries and the security forces and state violence are also being examined.

Mr Paisley said it was a very serious problem and how it could be worked through would require a lot of thought.

"These are matters which must be faced and faced honestly," he told the committee which monitors his office.

Its chairman, Ulster Unionist Danny Kennedy said: "There are a great many people out there who have never had truth, justice or people to speak for them."

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