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Ian Paisley

TUESDAY  
03/07/2007  
16:05:55

**Paisley message for troubles' victims**

Proposals to support thousands of Northern Ireland's conflict-scarred victims will be brought before the Assembly this autumn, the First

Minister has said.

By: Press Association

The Rev Ian Paisley told MLAs measures to improve services for sufferers and combat the legacy of the past would be introduced early in the new session of the legislature.

He was speaking during a debate in the Assembly in Belfast.

"I have a clear message to those victims who still suffer, `you are not forgotten nor will you ever be forgotten`," he said.

"I have discovered that tears have no political colour, they have no religious colour."

The Office of the First and Deputy First Minister is drawing up a strategy on future steps which will be considered by its scrutiny committee.

The Rev Paisley was speaking during a motion urging the establishment of a victims` and survivors` forum.

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The step was among those advocated by Interim Victims' Commissioner Bertha McDougall in a report in January.

The Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) widow also called for the memorial fund for those affected to be phased out and replaced by a more flexible arrangement.

Her report suggested establishing a fund for Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR) families similar to the police fund.

Jennifer McCann (Sinn Fein, West Belfast) criticised the report.

"Nowhere in Bertha Mc Dougall's report is there any mention of collusion or acknowledgement by the British State of its responsibility for, and its role as a protagonist in, the conflict," she said.

"The British Government needs to start acknowledging and taking on board the feelings and sensitivities of the victims of collusion and state violence.

"If we are to move into a society based on equality and justice and where human rights are respected then none of us should fear the truth. There must never be a hierarchy of victims."

Sinn Fein have lobbied against any implementation of Mrs McDougall's paper.

Today's debate followed a motion from the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) calling for the Interim Commissioner's findings to be implemented.

A Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) motion calling for a new policy was passed by the Assembly with Sinn Fein support.

The policy announced by the First Minister will also address the part of victims in building a better future.

However, Tom Elliott (UUP, Fermanagh, South Tyrone) said: "Our concern is that if these were not followed through at this stage you could be into another four years before another report and the whole current situation would be lost."

Gregory Campbell (DUP, East Derry) said IRA killers should not be considered alongside truly innocent victims.

"We were not all guilty, there were those who were guilty, those who pulled the trigger were guilty, they were not innocent and if they perished by their own hand then they were not innocent victims," Mr Campbell said.

"If they were innocent victims in the wrong place at the wrong time and they were murdered, bombed or shot dead they were innocent victims

and should be regarded as such."

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**DETAILS:** France / 93mins (15)

**RATING:** ★★☆☆☆

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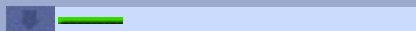
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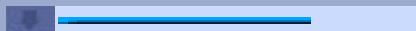
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