

**WEATHER** 2°C  
 Waterford 6°C  
 TODAY   
 5 DAY

[LOGIN](#)
[WEBMAIL](#)
[SITEMAP](#)
[CONTACT US](#)
[CUSTOMISE](#)
[SEARCH](#)

**HEADLINES**

[INTERNET](#)
[NEWSROOM](#)
[TELEVISION](#)
[UTV plc](#)



TUESDAY 19/12/2006 18:07:11

## Journalist murdered by loyalist gang for exposing dealers

A Northern Ireland journalist was gunned down in the street for exposing the drug dealing activities of a loyalist paramilitary gang, an inquest has heard.

By: Press Association

VIDEO
 COMMENTS
 HOT TOPIC
 RELATED STORIES

Martin O` Hagan, 51, a reporter with the Sunday World, was shot three times as he walked hand-in-hand home from a local pub in Lurgan, County Armagh, with his wife.

Over five years later the killers have not been charged, although a senior police officer told the inquest in Armagh that he was satisfied eight people interviewed following the murder were responsible.

Coroner John Leckey said the bravery of journalists seeking to expose criminals must be recognised.

He said he was satisfied with the police theory the murder of Mr O` Hagan was "related to investigative journalism in relation to drug dealing by the Loyalist Volunteer Force in the Mid Ulster area."

Branding the LVF a sinister organisation he said a number of newsagents in the area, fearful for their own safety, had stopped selling the Sunday paper after being threatened.

Mr Leckey said: "There were widespread threats not only against journalists like Mr O` Hagan who was seeking to expose these criminals but also against those who distributed the newspaper which contains his articles."

He noted Mr O` Hagan was the first journalist to be murdered in such circumstances in Northern Ireland but he said it was something which happened worldwide and pointed to the recent murder of a Russian investigative reporter.

### NEWS HEADLINES

- Haughey's dealings ruled unethical
- 1,000 more police to tackle guns
- O'Hagan killed for exposing LVF
- Stone attack - 'performance art'
- 11:15 Dublin gun victim laid to rest
- 11:14 Dublin's Port tunnel opens
- 11:07 €4m heroin seizure in Dublin
- 11:02 Air travel across Ireland disrupted
- 10:34 Armed robbery in west Belfast
- 10:01 Gardai probe Dublin shooting
- 09:55 Property motive to Co Down murder
- 09:41 Ruling on Ryanair takeover bid due
- 09:26 Catholic confidence in PSNI grows
- Talks continue to break deadlock
- Ahern's role in Haughey scandal
- Appeal in search for missing teen
- New plastic surgery posts for NI
- Man injured on Clare cargo ship
- Dublin Port ship dispute settled
- Regeneration plans for Conway Mill
- Charge dropped in Omagh trial
- Gardai appeal after Kilkenny killing
- Website moves to tackle abuse
- Hyland funeral held in Dublin
- Two women die in separate RTCs

### UTV NEWS ON AIR

**CLICK SILVER**  
 BROADBAND

**SPEEDS NOW UP TO 8MB\***

**FROM ONLY** **£9.99 NI**

**€9.99 ROI**

**ALSO**

**WIRELESS ROUTER OPTION AVAILABLE**

Customers receive **FREE broadband for a month**

**NEW**

**UTV TALK PEAK PACKAGE NOW AVAILABLE**

\* NI only

He said Mr O` Hagan and others were "bravely seeking to expose criminals and sometimes with dreadful prices paid. "Their bravery needs to be recognised," said Mr Leckey.

The murdered journalist`s wife Marie said they were walking home through Lurgan after visiting a local pub when she noticed a car slowing beside them.

She said her husband pushed her into a hedge and she heard a number of shots.

She turned and his last words to her as he slumped to the ground were: "Marie, get an ambulance."

She said she ran to her nearby house and got one of her children to make the call and returned to her husband.

"I ran back and Martin was lying on his back. I knelt down to speak to him, he seemed unconscious. I continued talking to Martin but got no response."

He was declared dead by an ambulance crew which quickly arrived at the scene.

Mrs O` Hagan told the inquest she didn`t know exactly what her husband had been working on before his death but was convinced it was something in connection with his work as a journalist.

She told the inquest that in the early 1990s her husband had been forced to move to his newspaper`s Dublin office because of threats made against him in Northern Ireland.

She had remained in Lurgan and he had returned to her after the IRA and loyalist ceasefires were announced.

Chief Inspector Charles Patterson told the inquest that Mr O` Hagan`s killers walked the streets freely despite him being certain who was responsible.

He said eight men had been arrested and questioned in the weeks after the murder and he was confident they were behind the killing.

"These people are associated with the LVF in the Lurgan area. Unfortunately despite extensive investigations I don`t have the evidence to proceed against these persons."

The coroner appealed for anyone with information to pass it to police and Mr Patterson said he was prepared to take any information, however trivial it might be.

He said the inquiry into the murder remained alive but admitted it was not actively being worked on.



Watch the latest on-air news bulletins.

[WATCH HERE](#)

If you have a **broadband** connection, such as **UTV ClickSilver**, you can watch a higher quality version.

[WATCH HERE](#)

Click below to browse through the archives of online streaming news.

[BROWSE HERE](#)

### SEARCH ARCHIVES



Enter a keyword above and select the newsroom section to search.

Click below to browse through the online news, sport and entertainment archives.

[BROWSE HERE](#)

However he said the case would be internally reviewed by the PSNI in the New Year and the O` Hagan family would be informed.

The unsolved case had not been passed to the Historic Inquiries Team - set up to re-examine many hundreds of unsolved murders - because the team`s terms of reference limited it to covering murders during the Troubles from 1968 to the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998.

Martin O` Hagan`s boss, Jim McDowell, Northern editor of the Sunday World, called for the review of the case to be held urgently.

He said: "It should be thorough and done with vigour and rigour."

He said it was an exceptional case, the killing of a journalist trying to protect the freedom of speech - five and a quarter years on no one had been convicted and that was appalling.

He said: "If the case has hit a brick wall bring in fresh faces, open a fresh file and let`s get Martin O` Hagan`s killers where they belong - behind bars."

He likened the killing to something which happened in the United States. "A drive-by drugs related murder like something off the streets of Chicago or New York."

He added: "I have to believe we will see them in court because if these people get away with this, where do the rest of us stand?"

He said the police had eight people in custody for questioning including two brothers and he wanted the review team to question them again."

He said if a review didn`t work he would be asking the Secretary of State and the Chief Constable, Sir Hugh Orde, to make an exception of the O` Hagan case and refer it to the Historic Investigations Team.

"The police know who did it but they don`t have the evidence, I know who did it."

He said the paper had come close to identifying those responsible but had pulled back in case it prejudiced any future case.

National Union of Journalists official Ronan Kelly called for the murder case to be resolved to remove the continuing threat to Mr O` Hagan`s journalistic colleagues.

He said: "The NUJ has called on the chief constable to call in assistance from an outside police force to bring this to a head.

"I believe there should be assistance from outside - if a case like this is not solved then enough has not been done."

 [E-mail this story to a friend](#)



COMMENT TRACKER:  
**LOGIN** to track comments on this story

post your comment 

[Privacy Policy](#) | [House Rules](#) | [Acceptable Use Policy](#) | [UTV Corporate](#) | [u.tv Journalism](#) | [UTV Local](#)

Copyright © 2006 UTV Internet and the UTV plc Group. All rights reserved.