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FRIDAY  
22/06/2007  
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**Team appointed to help NI deal with bloody past**

A group charged with probing Northern Ireland's troubled past will not be fully independent from government, Sinn Fein claimed today.

MLA Francie Molloy said the British government would have the final say on any recommendations made.

Lord Eames, who retired as Archbishop of Armagh six months ago, and Denis Bradley, the former priest and community mediator who was the first vice-chairman of the Policing Board, will decide if a Truth Commission similar to that set up in South Africa should be established or whether some other route to dealing with the hurt should be used.

Mr Molloy said: "Inevitably serious concerns do and will arise from the fact that the group is appointed by the British government and will report back to the British government which will have the final say on any recommendations."

The panel have been appointed to co-chair a small independent consultative group by Northern Ireland Secretary Peter Hain who said he had appointed the two men after consultation with First Minister Ian Paisley and Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness.

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Mr Hain said the group would consult widely and suggest how Northern Ireland might approach its past in a way that "heals rather than poisons".

Lord Eames said they had sought and been given a guarantee of total independence and among the things they would do would be to review much of the work from the past carried out by government and non government groups.

"How Northern Ireland deals with its collective memory will have a tremendous influence on the Northern Ireland of the future, because it is sapping away at many, many reasonable initiatives," he added.

"It is sapping away at ordinary people`s lives."

He said they would consult widely across the province on what was the way forward.

"There are a lot of people out there hurting, there are a lot of victims, there are a lot of people who have a story they feel they have not told."

They have been asked to report back to the Government in the summer of next year.

Mr Bradley added: "This is a consultation, people might think it is the Truth and Reconciliation South Africa model - but this is not what we are about.

"We may recommend that at the end of the day, people may convince us that is the way to go, but we may not make that recommendation."

Mr Hain said he knew it was not an easy task and he understood that many did not wish to discuss the past because it was too painful and personal.

"I believe that with the historic political agreement that was implemented only last month, it is time to pause and ask how a society that went thorough a violent and long conflict wants to deal with its past.

"The question is how Northern Ireland might approach its past in a way that heals rather than poisons, that enables everyone to focus on building a shared future, not looking constantly over shoulders to a divided past."

Lord Eames and Mr Bradley will work with a team of six and two international advisors.

The six are:

- :: Jarleth Burns former GAA captain of Armagh.
- :: The Rev Lesley Carroll, a Presbyterian Minister in North Belfast.
- :: Willie John McBride, former captain of the British and Irish Lions rugby team.
- :: James Mackey, a former lecturer in philosophy at Queen`s University

Belfast and visiting professor at Trinity College, Dublin.

:: Elaine Moore, alcohol and drugs counsellor at Magilligan Prison in Co Londonderry.

:: David Porter, director of the Centre for Contemporary Christianity in Ireland.

In addition the former Finnish Prime Minister Martti Ahtisaari - who oversaw the decommissioning of IRA weapons and sealing of arms dumps - and South African lawyer Brian Currin - who at one time was called in by the Government and tried to mediate over the Drumcree Orange parade dispute - have agreed to act as international advisors to the panel.

In an article published in a number of morning newspapers on both sides of the Irish border Mr Hain questioned whether more public inquiries such as that into Bloody Sunday were really the way ahead.

That inquiry has so far cost a staggering £180 million and is yet to report and Mr Hain said the real lesson of the inquiry was there had to be a better way of looking at the past.

Irish prime minister Bertie Ahern and Foreign Affairs Minister Dermot Ahern welcomed the news.

The Taoiseach said: "Of course, the best possible response to the tragedies we have seen is to make them forever a thing of the past," he continued.

"We have an unprecedented opportunity now to lay the foundations of a peaceful, prosperous and shared society on this island for the generations to come.

"We owe it to so many people, who were lost, or lost those they loved, to seize this moment and build that future."

DUP East Londonderry MP Gregory Campbell said, "This group must not fail to take account of the fact that there were thousands of people in Northern Ireland, irrespective of religious affiliation, who were entirely innocent and yet either were severely injured or killed while there were others who although they suffered also did so while carrying out illegal terrorist acts."

Alliance Party justice spokesman Stephen Farry said: "There are also other legacies of the past to be dealt with, such as the fate of `exiles` (forced out of the country by gunmen) and the effect of a history of paramilitarism and division on some communities.

"It is critical that the British and Irish governments, and in particular our new devolved administration, act on the recommendations that will eventually follow."

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**STARRING:** Bijou Phillips, Lauren German, Roger Bart, Richard Burgi.

**DETAILS:** US / 93mins (18)

**RATING:** ★★☆☆☆

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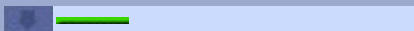
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