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FRIDAY
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Retired police officers angry over 'incompetence' of Ombudsman's Office

Retired police officers have passed a vote of no confidence in Northern Ireland Police Ombudsman Nuala O'Loan, it has been revealed.

They are angry about a report published earlier this year which linked members to collusion with loyalist paramilitaries responsible for 10 murders in north Belfast.

They have highlighted a police investigation into leaks surrounding the report which may have broken the Official Secrets Act.

The chairman of the Retired Police Officers` Association, David Turkington, said his members held the gravest concerns.

"The incompetence and ambitions of the Ombudsman`s Office are damaging not only to our members` peace of mind and public reputations but also to our national security, a matter of some concern to us," he said.

"As we know, the Ballast (informers) Statement made a number of indiscreet revelations concerning secret methodology which have enraged serving and retired members alike. But this was not an isolated error.

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"Her office had already, in December 2006, posted on the internet a report concerning the murder of Lance-Bombardier Stephen Restorick which was not only inaccurate in its account of relationships between the police and the military but also described secret methodology and rules of engagement in a highly irresponsible fashion."

The Ombudsman`s Ballast report last January said Ulster Volunteer Force killers had been involved in up to 10 north Belfast killings, colluding with the security forces.

Among those was Raymond McCord Jnr, 22, who was battered to death and his body dumped in a quarry in November 1997. Retired policemen have reacted angrily to the publication and accused Ms O`Loan of failing to base her findings on evidence. She has countered that they had failed to give evidence when approached.

Lance-Bombardier Restorick, the last British soldier killed in the north, was shot by a republican sniper while manning a checkpoint at Bessbrook in south Armagh in February 1997.

The Ombudsman`s Office has denied there was any breach of security in that case.

"We liaised with the relevant security agencies about issues to ensure that information isn`t put into the public domain which should not have been and we have done so in this case," a spokesman said.

Mr Turkington said he had sent a detailed dossier of the Ombudsman`s alleged failings to Northern Ireland Secretary Peter Hain.

"With the Office of Police Ombudsman mired in controversy and with its competence and impartiality called into question, the office can no longer enjoy the confidence of this Association," he added.

A spokesman for the police said: "We have received two complaints and are making preliminary inquiries."

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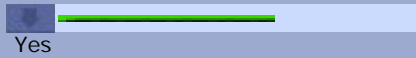
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