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PSNI blamed for delay

WEDNESDAY
27/02/2008
18:05:01

PSNI blamed for delaying inquest

The PSNI's failure to disclose files was today blamed for delaying an inquest into the death of a Co Down man whose family believe he was

murdered by the IRA.

A lawyer for the dead man`s family said police had put hurdle after hurdle in the way of finding out what happened.

The remains of Gareth O`Connor were found in a car in the Newry Canal in June 2005, just over two years after he disappeared. The Armagh man had not been seen since May 2003 when he vanished as he drove towards Dundalk to answer bail at the town`s Garda station after being charged with belonging to the dissident Real IRA.

Detectives and his family have pointed the finger of blame at the IRA, despite denials from the Provisionals` leadership.

At a preliminary hearing today Northern Ireland chief coroner John Leckey was told by a solicitor acting for the Chief Constable, Sir Hugh Orde, that it was likely to be at least another two months before the PSNI would be able to say what documents on the police investigation could be disclosed for the inquest.

Paul Dougan, representing the families, hit out saying : "Disclosure has been parked for an inordinately long time.

"Every time we come to these preliminary hearings there is another hurdle, another delay. It is unfortunate that we don`t seem to be able to timetable anything."

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Mr Leckey said that, realistically, it was unlikely an inquest could be held before the autumn.

Mr Dougan responded: "There seems to be uncontrollable slippage. I have no confidence we will be any further ahead by summertime or early autumn."

He said he would like to be able to give the family of the dead man some hope the matter would be resolved "by the end of the calendar year".

The PSNI's Retrospective Review Team is currently taking a fresh look at the case and the Police Ombudsman's office are probing the original investigation after criticisms by a judge during an unrelated trial.

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