



Jim Allister

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Loughinisland families visit Brussels

A Northern Ireland MEP has denounced a European Parliament visit by the families of six men murdered in a loyalist massacre as a Sinn Fein "coat-trailing exercise".

By: Press Association

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Families of six men shot dead by the Ulster Volunteer Force as they watched a 1994 World Cup match in a bar in Loughinisland, County Down, joined Sinn Fein's Bairbre de Brun and Caitriona Ruane for a series of meetings with MEPs yesterday to highlight their concerns about security force collusion in the attack.

But while Jim Allister described the Loughinisland shootings as an outrage, he also claimed the allegations of collusion were outlandish and said they proved Sinn Fein was insincere about dealing with the past.

"Yesterday's coat-trailing exercise in Brussels by Sinn Fein, based on outlandish claims about collusion in the Loughinisland murders, in itself shows how insincere Sinn Fein is about moving forward," he said.

"Its preference for wallowing in the mire of finger-pointing at the security forces shows nothing is really changing in Sinn Fein/IRA. They expect everyone else to overlook and forget their gruesome past, but insist on spurious muck-raking against the security forces.

"The Loughinisland murders, like all terrorist crimes, were indeed a terrible outrage, whose perpetrators deserve to be convicted and severely punished - through the judicial process which Sinn Fein refuses to support.

"But, of course, if convicted, thanks to the Belfast Agreement of Sinn Fein and others, they would walk free, like so many other terrorists before them."

The Loughinisland victims were watching Jack Charlton's Republic of

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Ireland squad beat Italy in the 1994 USA World Cup on television in the bar when the UVF gang struck, opening fire on customers.

The targets, all Catholic, came from Loughinisland, Ballynahinch, Drumaness and Downpatrick.

They were father of two Adrian Rogan, 34, Eamon Byrne, 39, married with four children, his brother-in-law Patsy O`Hare, 35, Dan McCreanor, 59, a farmer, his uncle Barney Green, an 87-year-old retired pig farmer who was married, and Malcolm Jenkinson, 54, a building contractor who was married with three children.

Northern Ireland Police Ombudsman Nuala O`Loan is holding an inquiry into the police investigation into the massacre following complaints from the families, through their solicitors, about serious flaws.

In particular, they raised concern about the loss of potentially vital forensic evidence and the decision by the police to destroy the UVF`s red getaway car in 1996.

They also expressed concerns about recent claims that a police agent codenamed Mechanic was believed to have supplied the car.

The relatives have called for an inquiry into the link between the Czech-made VZ rifle used in the attack and the arms shipment brought to Northern Ireland from South Africa by loyalists, including Ulster Defence Association member and British agent Brian Nelson.

Patrick McCreanor, whose family lost two generations in the attack, yesterday welcomed pledges of support from all the parties they met in the European Parliament.

"If things were right at home we should not have to do this. If the police had tried to investigate this properly we would not be here," he said.

Mr Allister recalled that Loughinisland figured in the investigation into the £26.5 million heist on the Northern Bank in Belfast two years ago - an incident which was blamed on the Provisional IRA.

"It was there, less than two years ago, that the IRA`s Northern Bank robbery squad held hostage one of the staff and kidnapped his wife," he said.

"Base hypocrites that they are, Sinn Fein came to Brussels demanding transparency on the Loughinisland killings but to this day deny ownership of their IRA`s own handiwork at Loughinisland in the Northern Bank robbery."

Ms Ruane branded the Democratic Unionist MEP`s comments insensitive and insulting to the Loughinisland families.

The Sinn Fein Assembly member accused Mr Allister of making a number of crass and obnoxious statements in the European Parliament attacking



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victims and victims` groups who did not fit into his stereotype of victimhood.

"There can be no hierarchy nor monopoly on suffering," she said.

"His insensitive and insulting comments reflect the DUP`s total disregard for the families whose loved ones were killed at Loughinisland in 1994."

Ms Ruane said the MEP`s dismissal of the role of police informers and the subsequent failure to adequately investigate and bring the murderers to justice would hurt the relatives who had campaigned with dignity for 12 years for the truth.

"The question must be asked - are the DUP frightened of the truth?" she said.

"I have spoken with a number of families this morning and they are hurt by Mr Allister`s comments but determined not to let his comments deflect nor overshadow their quest for justice and closure."

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