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## Local & National

### Orde offers apology to families of victims

Monday, January 22, 2007

By Noel McAdam

Tony Blair today voiced "profound regret" over the Policing Ombudsman's report into police and loyalist paramilitary collusion.

Mr Blair's official spokesman said: "This is a deeply disturbing report about events which were totally wrong and which should never have happened.

"But this is also a report about the past, and what is important now is that, under the new (policing) structures... these events could not happen now.

"What matters at this stage is that the whole community supports that process of transformation."

PSNI Chief Constable Sir Hugh Orde offered an apology to the victims' families over the report, which he described as making "shocking, disturbing and uncomfortable reading".

"While I appreciate that it cannot redress some of the tragic consequences visited upon the families of those touched by the incidents investigated in this report, I offer a whole-hearted apology for anything done or left undone," he said.

Sir Hugh said all the Ombudsman's recommendations relating to the police service were accepted in full.

"Significant re-organisation and the new systems and processes to deal with this most difficult area of policing which we have put in place over the last four and a half years will ensure that the situation described by the Ombudsman could never happen again in Northern Ireland," he said.

He said those systems had been formed by independent reports, including Patten, Stevens and Crompton.

The Alliance Party, however, demanded further examination of the revelations of the report, which leader David Ford said the comprehensive report had shed "some much-needed light" on incidents and practices.

"There is an onus on the authorities to demonstrate how the system has changed so that such abuses of power and responsibility can never happen again," he added.

"The authorities must pay attention to this report to ensure that they can build confidence in the police to ensure the full support of everyone in this community."

But a DUP Assembly candidate urged former police officers to withdraw support from the Ombudsman. Former chairman of the Police Federation Jimmy Spratt said the report proved the office of the Ombudsman was a "clearly discredited" organisation.






The Castlereagh Mayor said the office was biased towards the Royal Ulster Constabulary and in particular former members of RUC Special Branch.

Mr Spratt, a South Belfast DUP candidate for the elections due in March, said: "I again call on all former police officers to withdraw any support or cooperation from the Police Ombudsman and her staff.

"(They are) now without any credibility, having clearly demonstrated their bias towards the Royal Ulster Constabulary."

Mr Spratt alleged the report was based mainly on "tittle tattle", as opposed to real evidence: mostly based on the word of a discredited former alleged Special Branch agent and so-called 'whistleblowers'.

He said: "If this report had had one shred of credible evidence then we could have expected charges against former police officers.

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