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From The Belfast Telegraph Archives

The Government was last night challenged to prove its commitment to dealing with the legacy of the Troubles after major job losses were announced in a police team investigating the past.

The Historical Enquiries Team (HET) is to make 75 of its 190 staff redundant, only weeks after

Government funding was promised to have secured the future of the special police unit.

The HET is re-examining unsolved murders from the Troubles, work which victims' groups said has benefited many bereaved families.

The Commission for Victims and Survivors said it believed the £1.4m deficit in the HET budget appeared to have been plugged and said victims would be shocked to hear the latest news.

"Some families have been waiting decades for an initiative like HET," said Commissioner Mike Nesbitt.

"This is a process which can do a lot of good for families, but it can also do harm, and one way it will cause damage is if it fails to deliver on its promises.

"We hear weekly from people who have become deeply frustrated at the length of time HET takes to complete its investigations. This news will only make it worse."

HET director Dave Cox reassured families that, despite the requirement to scale back operations, the work of the team would continue.

"There is a commitment from all parties that the HET will continue to deliver this crucial work for families.

"In the current economic environment, difficult decisions have to be made and the HET, as with other agencies, is facing financial pressures for the coming year," he said.

"In view of that we have a responsibility to keep our team advised of the situation. As things stand, we will have to reduce the size of the team from 190 to around 115 staff. That will bring us in line with our £5.9m budget allocation for next year."

The net effect is that victims lose confidence

He said the HET, set up three years ago, has worked with hundreds of families to date and will continue to deliver a service to them which is both professional and cost-effective.

A major report is due in the new year from the Consultative Group on the Past, led by Lord Eames and Denis Bradley, which will plot out a way of dealing with the myriad of issues left over from the years of violence.

But Mr Nesbitt said his group was concerned at the impact of the HET jobs threat. "The net effect is that victims and survivors lose confidence, not only in the HET process, but in any future scheme that may be proposed to address their needs," he said.

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Belfast, Bloody Friday, 21 July, 1972, the IRA set off 26 explosions in Belfast, which killed 11 people and injured 130. 7 people were killed in Oxford Street bus station and 4 at a shopping centre on the Cavehill Road.

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The same should be extended to all those other costly enquiries like Bloody Sunday, to name but one. Lord Saville I felt was very arrogant in his refusal to meet with the audit committee due to some spurious reason which could have been got round. It is public money that is bankrolling Saville and all the other legals and he should have been compelled to appear and give an update. The whole HET thing is the same. We cannot continue to remain in the past at any expense. If anyone is to do this it should be the Victims' Commissioners - there is enough of them.

Posted by Thos | 05.12.08, 12:59 GMT

The HET is a costly, cynical and manipulative exercise in victim management to make it appear that someone gives a damn about victims' families. I cooperated with this highly paid team as they reviewed my own brother's murder. Their report was a meaningless, academic, exercise that told me nothing I didn't already know. They refused to arrest known suspects. Instead of redundancies the HET should be scrapped and replaced by a proper victims-centred body that will carry out in-depth cold case investigations and provide victims' families with answers and justice. Not patronising reports.

Posted by George | 05.12.08, 10:10 GMT

While its sad anyone should lose their job, I think this is further evidence that, except for some who may never get over the grieving process, both communities in NI are gradually moving on and away from dredging up the past. Amen to that.

Posted by mickey | 05.12.08, 09:42 GMT

The HET is a waste of money. A lot of people who were involved in murders during 'The Troubles' are already dead and nobody is coming back to life. If the people involved in HET know anything about police work they should be doing something to help the community today. Forget the past.

Posted by MARC | 05.12.08, 03:49 GMT

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