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Sir Ronnie denies claim he called murder victim 'an immoral woman'

Tuesday, 20 January 2009

A key allegation that fuelled the calls for a public inquiry into Rosemary Nelson's murder was the claim that some police officers had come to associate the solicitor with the alleged crimes of her clients.

The inquiry looked at the murder of two police officers as they patrolled Lurgan in 1997 — a killing which came close to the re-instatement of the then stalled IRA ceasefire and which caused widespread condemnation.

The inquiry was shown a censored security document which read: "Rosemary Nelson took a statement off (name withheld) discrediting the character of (name withheld), who is the key witness to the murder of the two RUC officers in Lurgan on 16 June 1997."

The document claimed Mrs Nelson pressurised the witness into giving the statement and planned to fax it to politicians around the globe to ensure the release of her client Colin Duffy, charged with the killings.

Sir Ronnie said in his statement to the inquiry that he believed a campaign was under way to undermine the supposed eye-witness, but he added: "I was not briefed on Rosemary Nelson doing anything untoward in that regard."

Under questioning from Mr Phillips, Sir Ronnie said he believed Mrs Nelson was doing her job as a solicitor.

When questioned about evidence given by other senior RUC officers who claimed Mrs Nelson was effectively helping the IRA and had "crossed the line", Sir Ronnie said: "I would not describe Mrs Nelson in those terms."

Having viewed documents available to the inquiry, he said he would not draw the same conclusions on Mrs Nelson's actions that the other officers had. Sir Ronnie added that he had received no formal briefing that Mrs Nelson was having an affair with Colin Duffy.

He also faced claims that a senior civil servant David Watkins had alleged under questioning that the former police chief described Mrs Nelson as an "immoral woman".

"Absolutely not," said Sir Ronnie. "And I have read the evidence and it seems to me to be completely at odds with the statement." The former RUC chief continues his evidence today.

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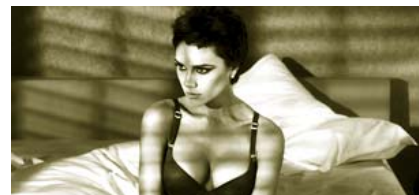


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