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Local & National

Accusations and anger about how to deal with violent past

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Tuesday, January 08, 2008

By Victoria O'Hara

Tempers flared last night at the first meeting of a group set up to plan how to deal with the past violence in Northern Ireland.

During the meeting of the Consultative Group on the Past an argument broke out between victims spokesman Willie Frazer and a member of the public.

Co-chair of the group and former Church of Ireland primate Lord Eames appealed for calm as the heated exchange of words marred the first of seven public meetings held in Belfast.

Mr Frazer was heckled after he spoke of concerns that an amnesty for paramilitaries and criminals would be recommended by the group.

"We have heard an interim report has been done by yourselves and one of the main suggestions that an amnesty is one of the main things that has come out of it," he said.

"If you are talking about an amnesty to the murders of our loved ones you can get out of them chairs and head home now, because you will solve nothing in this country."

After he spoke a man accused Mr Frazer of not representing victims of both sides.

Insults were hurled between the two men.

However after an appeal from Lord Eames, members of the public intervened and the debate continued.

During the meeting Raymond McCord, whose son Raymond junior was murdered by loyalist paramilitaries, was among a number of people who questioned the appointment of the panel.

"I was very reluctant to come because as far as I am concerned it is like an NIO stunt," he said.

"Let's put people in the panel who are victims themselves.

"They are talking about dealing with the past. How I want the past dealt with, we don't want people sitting across tables saying, 'I murdered your son, your brother, your father' then walking away and not prosecuted.

"We want to see justice.

"We want to see people in court."

He also raised concern about the reported amnesty.

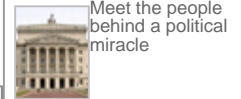
However Lord Eames said the panel had made no proposals for an amnesty.

"There has been absolutely no interim report or any other sort of report," he said.

"We have made not made a report until the consultation process goes on until the end of the month.

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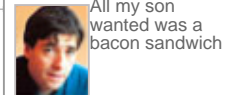
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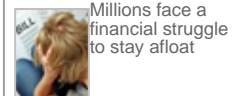
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"You have my word, and the words of my colleagues we have not made an interim report.

Ireland's Saturday Night

"As far as amnesty is concerned there have been no proposals made to anyone."

Community Telegraph

However co-chairman Denis Bradley said that "it doesn't mean that an amnesty is off the table".

One victim, whose two brothers were murdered in 1975 because they were Catholic, also questioned why the panel were not victims, adding that "only victims can talk to victims".

Mr Bradley said: "This is a very important debate for our society and we either grab this opportunity at this moment in time or not.

"If you only work out of your own hurt of being a victim and do not see beyond your own hurt then you can create an imbalance."

The group is due to publish a report this summer.

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