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By Brian Rowan  
Monday, 20 October 2008

Paramilitaries and security forces could provide information in secret on killings without fear of prosecution under a new blueprint for dealing with Northern Ireland's violent past, it emerged today.

The three-strand process is the latest thinking from inside the Consultative Group on Northern Ireland's Past — co-chaired by retired Church of Ireland Archbishop Lord Eames and former Policing Board vice chairman Denis Bradley.

Under the new proposals, there will be a five-year commission to investigate murders — headed by an independent international commissioner.

The British and Irish Governments would appoint that commissioner with

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the agreement of the Executive and there will be an Investigations Unit and an Information Recovery Unit.

The plan is for the Investigations Unit to take over the work of the current Historical Enquiries Team and the legacy cases that are dealt with by the Police Ombudsman's office.

Today's proposals mean the Eames-Bradley Group has decided not to have "a full amnesty".

"Prosecution is the first route," a source commented.

But if prosecution is not possible — then with the agreement of families cases can go to the Information Recovery Unit.

Anyone with knowledge of killings will be encouraged to "tell what they know" — and any information they would give would not be admissible in court. That means there would be immunity from prosecution.

This process would cover the security forces, republicans and loyalists.

Organisations — rather than specific individuals — could provide the information.

"It's about organisational responsibility," a source commented stressing there will be no public hearings.

"It's private," he commented

It is accepted that in the vast bulk of unsolved killings here there is little chance of prosecution.


A spokesman for the Eames-Bradley Group said: "We are still working on our report. Any speculation is unhelpful, and we would urge everyone to wait on our final report."

That document is expected to be published within the next couple of months.

It is still being presented as "a work in progress" — but the three-strand approach of Commission, Investigations Unit and Information Recovery Unit will be at the heart of the group's recommendations when the document is delivered to the Secretary of State later this year.

The consultation has included meetings with political parties, the UVF leadership, Sinn Fein leaders Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness and the Stevens teams, which investigated allegations of security force collusion with paramilitaries.

The IRA refused to meet the group, but Gerry Adams has called for an Independent International Truth Commission, which he said should be supported by "all relevant parties".

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*Posted by mickey* | 20.10.08, 14:12 GMT

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