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By Chris Thornton
Monday, 4 August 2008

The university lecturer taking discrimination cases against the First Ministers has described the hunt for the Victims Commissioner as "a sham".

In a statement issued through her solicitors, Dr Marie Breen-Smyth has confirmed that she was offered one of the four posts announced, but "raised a series of concerns" about the decision to turn one job into four.

She said the four salaries paid out of public money were "unwarranted" and the money would be "better spent directly on victims". In the second legal action filed over that controversial decision, she alleges that the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) breached "equality and recruitment principles and procedures".

The Belfast Telegraph revealed last week that Dr Breen-Smyth, a reader in international politics at the University of Wales who has written three

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books about Northern Ireland, had filed cases with the Industrial and Fair Employment tribunals in Belfast.

What are these?

She declined to comment at the time, but today issued a statement through her solicitors indicating her frustration with the handling of the process by Ian Paisley and Martin McGuinness. Last week a spokesman for OFMDFM said the actions will be vigorously defended. Another legal action is being pursued in the High Court by Shankill bomb victim Michelle Williamson. The permanent post for a Victims Commissioner was first advertised in January 2007.

When Dr Paisley and Mr McGuinness took up office in May that year, they were presented with a shortlist of six names, including Dr Breen-Smyth and Mike Nesbitt, one of the four current commissioners. They sat on a decision for months, and announced in October last year that they would re-advertise the post to get a wider field of candidates, while keeping the six shortlisted.

Dr Breen-Smyth said she was offered one of the four posts, but raised several concerns. She said there had been no consultation with victims and that "appointing four people with identical job descriptions, no role definitions and no lines of accountability was organisationally inadvisable".

Her case alleges that "the recruitment process was a sham, made without the necessary legislation in place for the position and that the appointments process breached equality and recruitment principles and procedures".

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