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Politics

MLAs could be 'humiliated' if a truth commission was to be held

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Thursday, September 13, 2007

By Chris Thornton

Some Executive Ministers and other MLAs would be "appalled and humiliated" if details of their past activities were exposed by a truth commission, the head of the Police Federation said yesterday.

Terry Spence, whose organisation represents thousands of rank and file officers, also revealed the Federation is seeking to meet Sinn Fein - with the approval of an RUC widows' group.

Addressing the Federation's annual conference, Mr Spence said his officers are opposed to suggestions of a truth commission on the Troubles.

He said the Consultative Group on the Past, currently examining ways of dealing with the past under Lord Eames and Denis Bradley, "must address the legacy of the past with the widest possible remit".

"They should look for an answer which does not saddle this generation and its successors with the world's largest re-investigation industry," Mr Spence told Secretary of State Shaun Woodward and 150 delegates.

"We need, if not a one size fits all solution to dealing with the past, then an approach or even a multitude of approaches which allows the individuality of grief to find expression and, through time, eventual comfort.

"There can be no truth commission included in their recommendations," he said. And, in an apparent reference to Sinn Fein president Gerry Adams, he added: "Especially when one of the leading proponents of a truth commission cannot even admit that he was in the IRA."

Mr Spence said the Federation has asked for the groundbreaking meeting with Sinn Fein, but has not yet received a reply.

He said the request has been with Sinn Fein "some weeks now but we are not disheartened".

"I look forward to their acceptance of our request to meet them," he told the conference in a Belfast hotel.

"In making this initiative I must pay tribute to the wider police family, particularly the RUC GC Widows' Association, who have supported us in this endeavour. It has not been easy for them either."

He said the Federation has "much to discuss" with Sinn Fein, "not about the past but about how policing can be a freely accessible, professionally-delivered service to the community".

Mr Spence also referred to the Federation's unsuccessful attempt to pursue claims for post-traumatic stress disorder on behalf of 5,000 officers who say they were scarred by the Troubles. He said the officers are considering an appeal of a recent High Court ruling that rejected their claims - but asked Mr Woodward to consider if more legal action would benefit anyone.

He said the six years of legal action "is an incredibly sorry episode and one in which neither the Police Service of Northern Ireland nor the Northern Ireland Office can take any pride".

"So after six years of litigation we have to ask: where do we go from here?" Mr Spence asked. "Secretary of State, I invite the Chief Constable and the Northern Ireland Office to ask themselves the same question. I find it difficult to believe the prospect of another six years of litigation is any bit more attractive to you than it is to us. Litigation is no answer and as a response lacks both merit and most important of all - compassion."

Mr Spence also said police have "extreme anger" over the way the Government is seeking to change police pay.

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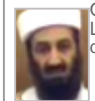
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