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Local & National

PSNI says Stalker report is 'top secret'

Thursday, November 29, 2007

By Chris Thornton

The PSNI has told Northern Ireland's senior coroner that John Stalker's report on "shoot to kill" incidents remains classified as "top secret", 20 years after it was completed.

Families of republicans killed by police during the incidents said they fear the announcement indicates that police intend to try to scupper inquests, by refusing Coroner John Leckey's request to see the report.

Mr Leckey has indicated he intends to revive inquests into the three controversial incidents, which happened in 1982.

Thirteen years ago, Mr Leckey abandoned inquests into the deaths of teenager Michael Tighe, shot on November 24 1982; IRA members Eugene Toman, Sean Burns and Gervaise McKerr, who were shot on November 11 1982; and INLA members Roderick Carroll and Seamus Grew, shot on December 12 1982.

He dropped the cases because he could not force police to hand over the report of investigations into the three sets of killings by English policemen John Stalker and Colin Sampson.

But a House of Lords ruling earlier this year said police should supply coroners with all material relating to killings, unless they get an official Government gag.

As a result, Mr Leckey said in October he can "see no reason why I should not now be provided with access to both reports".

At that stage, a police lawyer said legal advice was being taken about disclosing the reports.

But Assistant Chief Constable Alistair Finlay, who is in charge of dealing with historic cases and inquiries, recently wrote to Mr Leckey informing him that the "Stalker/Sampson papers are currently classified as 'Top Secret'".

A preliminary hearing on the cases is due next week.

Relatives of some of the men killed say they fear that indicates the police will resist handing over the report.

"We're not interested in a re-run of what happened before," said Tommy Carroll, brother of Roderick Carroll.

"If (PSNI Chief Constable) Hugh Orde thinks he's doing that, we'll be instructing our lawyers to go direct to Europe. Hugh Orde says the report is top secret. John Stalker was not called in to conduct a top secret inquiry. Hugh Orde has a choice here: is he overseer of a new police force or the RUC dressed up in a new uniform? The choice is his."

Mark Thompson, director of the group Relatives for Justice, said: "Hugh Orde cannot act as gatekeeper in terms of preventing the truth about the circumstances surrounding some of the most controversial killings during the conflict from being examined by the Coroner and inquest court.

"He cannot continue the old guard agenda of the RUC.

"It would be wholly unacceptable for the Chief Constable to withhold this evidence and we would call on the Policing Board to address this as a matter of priority at their next meeting."

The PSNI has not commented on the letter.

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