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Wright inquiry start frustrates Finucane family

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Wednesday, May 30, 2007

By Chris Thornton

The family of Pat Finucane said today that it was frustrating to see the start of Northern Ireland's first public inquiry into collusion when the murdered solicitor's case remains in limbo.

The solicitor's youngest son, John, spoke as the Billy Wright Inquiry was due to begin taking evidence in public at Banbridge Court House this morning, following two High Court battles and the disappearance of key evidence.

Hearings begin with evidence from Richard English, a Queen's University professor who will discuss the political background to the LVF leader's murder. Dozens of witnesses are due to follow him. The examination of the Wright killing is the first of four collusion inquiries to proceed to full hearings, almost 10 years after the Portadown loyalist was shot in prison.

Retired Canadian Supreme Court Justice Peter Cory recommended public hearings into the four cases back in 2003.

Inquiries into the murders of solicitor Rosemary Nelson and Portadown dad Robert Hamill have formally opened and hearings are pending, but the Government has so far failed to appoint a tribunal to start work on the 1989 Finucane murder.

"Considering that the recommendations for these inquiries were all made at the same time, it is very frustrating that there is no prospect of an inquiry into my father's case on the horizon," said John Finucane.

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"We're desperate to be involved in an inquiry and we hope that the British Government will take steps to proceed."

The Finucane family and the Government are in a stand-off about the terms for the inquiry. The family objects to the use of the Inquiries Act, a controversial law that was rushed through Parliament two years ago to be applied to the Finucane case.

"We are still not in a position to endorse a flawed inquiry," John Finucane said. "We're still very much in the dark about what the Government intends to do."

The Inquiries Act gives ministers greater powers over secrecy and also allows the Secretary of State to stop an inquiry at any stage. Critics - including Justice Cory - say that hampers the independence of an inquiry.

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