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## Politics

### Paisley not welcome at La Mon commemoration

Monday, January 28, 2008

By David Young

Victims of one of Northern Ireland's worst IRA terrorist attacks have told Stormont First Minister Ian Paisley to stay away from planned 30th anniversary commemorations of the atrocity.

Some of the survivors of the La Mon hotel bombing, which claimed the lives of 12 people in February 1978, say Mr Paisley is not welcome at the memorial service because of the DUP's decision to go into government with Sinn Fein.

It has been alleged that senior members of Sinn Fein were involved in or had knowledge of the IRA plan to target the Belfast hotel.

Billy McDowell, who was badly injured in the attack, said the DUP leader's new relationship with Sinn Fein made him feel sick.

"Paisley should stay away from our commemoration," he told the Sun day Tribune.

"He'd probably want to bring (Martin) McGuinness with him if he could.

Seeing them chuckling at Stormont turns my stomach."

Mr McDowell's wife Lily also suffered extensive injuries in the La Mon bombing. The majority of those killed or injured were attending the Irish Collie club's annual dinner dance.

The club's then vice chairman Hugh McGucken said he could not stand to see the First Minister at the memorial service.

"If Paisley comes to our commemoration, I'll walk out," he told the Tribune. The commemorative event is being held in Castlereagh Borough Council offices on February 17.

It is expected that senior DUP members will be invited to attend.

DUP deputy Peter Robinson was a long standing member of Castlereagh council before his recent decision to resign his seat.

His wife Iris, the chair of Stormont's health committee, is still a Castlereagh councillor.

DUP MP Jeffrey Donaldson acknowledged that some victims found it hard to accept the powersharing arrangements at Stormont.

The Lagan Valley representative said his party leader fully respected those feelings and would not attend an event to which he was not invited.

"We understand and respect the sensitivities there are among some within the victims' sector who have suffered greatly as a result of atrocities like La Mon," he said.

"We appreciate that some victims find it difficult to accept what's happening at Stormont and Dr Paisley would not attend an event to which he was not invited."

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Mr Donaldson said the appointment of a new victims' commission and increased funding for the sector underlined his party's commitment to those who lost loved ones during the Troubles.

"The reason we went into government was to ensure tragedies of the past are not visited upon the next generation and a lasting peace is secured for all the people of Northern Ireland," he added.

"That said we respect the views of those individuals who take a different approach and understand the sensitivities of individuals who find it difficult to come to terms with the progress that has been made politically."

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