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# News & Opinion

## Latest news

### Reconciliation will be at the heart of report says Eames

#### North Belfast News

A 'cancer of sectarianism' has eaten its way into many areas of life in the north, a justice group meeting was told this week.

The comments from former Anglican archbishop Dr Robin Eames came as he addressed the Relatives For Justice Annual General meeting at the Falls Road library on Monday.

The co-chair of the Consultative Group on the Past - who RFJ has maintained close links with during its consultation process - stated at the meeting that we still live in a sectarian, segregated and separated society. He said that while huge progress has been made the peace has 'not yet been won'.

Lord Eames said that reconciliation will be at the heart of the group's highly anticipated report which is due out early next year. The former Church of Ireland Archbishop said that he welcomed the opportunity to 'talk and listen' at Monday's meeting which was attended by bereaved families and those who have been affected by the conflict. RFJ believe that the only way to bring truth to the greatest number of families is through an international independent truth commission.

"The complexities and difficulties in how we deal with the legacy of our troubled past will come as no surprise to you sitting in this room," said Lord Eames.

"Outside the victims sector there are many who would wish that the past would just go away, who believe that we simply throw money at meeting the physical and emotional needs of the victims and then they should be happy, that they should go away and allow the rest of society get on with the future. Dealing with the past, ladies and gentlemen is not just about victims, it is about our entire society."

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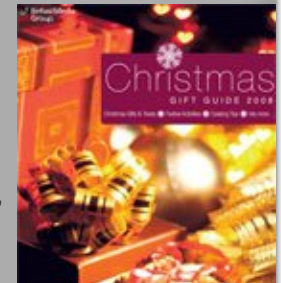
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Lord Eames said that if the past is to be truly dealt with, the well-being of those who have suffered most must be looked after, adding to end there would be to stop far short of actually dealing with the fundamental issues that led to "our society ripping itself apart over the last 40 years".

"Meeting the needs of victims and survivors is just one part of the elaborate tapestry intended to effectively deal with our past," he said.

"It is also deeply unfair to place the entire burden of dealing with the past on the shoulders of victims alone. All of us in our society have to look deep within ourselves and ask what role we have to play in dealing with this issue. Only with a collective response right across this community can we hope to build a shared and reconciled future in which we do not create a new generation of victims and that is something that neither you nor I nor anyone wants to see."

Lord Eames urged the audience to wait for the consultative group's final report which he said takes a holistic approach to the past. He said that the report looks at the whole picture and is not a piecemeal approach.

He said that while some people want the prosecution route to remain open, others want as much information as possible about the circumstances of the deaths of their loved ones.

"They and you should be given that opportunity," he said.

"However I would be misleading you if I didn't say that getting justice and finding truth are going to be very, very hard.

"Some argue that a lot of money has been spent in dealing with the past and that nothing more should be done, they say that the current processes should be simply be allowed to run their course.

"We disagree with that for a number of reasons. If we base dealing with the past solely on how much it costs in financial terms then we will be making a huge error of judgement. Of course we are mindful of the current economic climate, but the reasons for dealing with this issue go far beyond finance."

He added this was not a time for short term strategy and that any new approach must be fair to everyone.

Lord Eames went on to say that The Consultative Group on the Past believe that the current legal processes are not the best way to deal with the legacy of the conflict. He said that either a better way has to be found or the processes are let continue for many years to come.

guide.

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How remembering of the past should take place will form an important part of the report said Lord Eames. He also said that reconciliation will be at the heart of the report.

"The truth is we live in a sectarian, segregated and separated society. It is often said that more walls were built to keep communities apart since the ceasefire than during the conflict and there is a lot of truth in that. A cancer of sectarianism has eaten its way into many areas of life in this place.

"What has been achieved is the absence of violence but as long as the hatred, the suspicion and the desire for revenge remain, then the possibility of the return to violence looms over our society. We have made huge progress but the peace has not yet been won."

"Only when wider society takes ownership of the past will we begin to ensure that it is not revisited on a new generation," he added.