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Patience is wearing thin

Bloody Sunday families hit out at delays



John Kelly with the letter informing him that the decision of the Bloody Sunday Tribunal will not be released for another year. (0811JB02)



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Families of those killed and injured on Bloody Sunday issued a public plea to Lord Saville this week asking for clarity as to why the long-awaited Saville Report will be delayed another year.

John Kelly, whose brother Michael was among 14 people killed, told the 'Journal': "All of a sudden the timescale changed again and we need to know the reason why. We have waited so long already - and now our patience is starting to wear thin."

"Since the Inquiry began, six of the injured have died, campaigning siblings have died and there's only one surviving parent left, Lawrence McElhinney (father of Kevin McElhinney). So time really is of the essence," he said.

The latest delays were revealed in a letter from the chairman of the Bloody Sunday inquiry, Lord Saville, who stated that the final report will not be completed until autumn 2009. Previous correspondence indicating that the findings would be completed in December this year were described as "a substantial underestimate".

Apologising for the delay, Lord Saville went on: "We have always found it difficult, given the scale and

complexity of the material with which we are dealing, to predict accurately how long it will take us to complete our task", adding that the Inquiry team were determined to "deal fairly, accurately and thoroughly with the issues before us".

Mr. Kelly went on: "We had heard that the report would be finished by the end of 2008 or shortly thereafter and believed we were coming to the end of the journey, so this is obviously a knockback. We were given assurances and so we need to know what has changed?"

"Realistically, we're talking 2010 now because it has to go to the Secretary of State long before it will ever come to us. So in terms of handing it over to us, we're looking at the possibility of a further year and a half. By then, the report will have taken 12 years from start to finish.

Mr. Kelly said he hoped there would be no further delays. "The public are frustrated and this has affected people traumatically. Everyone has waited patiently, not just the families and the injured, and now we have to wait even longer."

Mr. Kelly's concerns have been echoed by the Northern Ireland Office, who issued the following statement: "The Secretary of State was surprised and disappointed to learn today of yet another delay in completing the report of the Bloody Sunday Inquiry. He shares the concerns of the families and of others who are understandably concerned about the cost of further delay. The completion of the report is a matter for the independent inquiry but the NIO will be taking up their offer to discuss the implications of this announcement as a matter of urgency."

SDLP Leader and Foyle MP, Mark Durkan MLA said that news of the delay would be "a source of great frustration" to the victims' families.

"The report taking so long and the fears that it may be delayed further is a source of some anxiety and apprehension," Mr. Durkan said.

SDLP Councillor and Bloody Sunday Trust member Colum Eastwood reacted angrily to the news and said: "This latest set back has left some people questioning their faith in the process... It is essential that Saville reports his findings as soon as possible."

Sinn Féin MLA and member of the Bloody Sunday Trust, Raymond McCartney also voiced his deep concern, saying that since the Inquiry concluded four years ago the families have "waited with patience and dignity" for its publication.

"This latest delay is a blow to the confidence of the families that the report will reach the truthful conclusion and there is a growing fear that political interference on behalf of the British Government may be adding to the delays."

Mr. McCartney intends to raise the matter at the Assembly next week and called on the people of Derry to "remain steadfast" in their pursuit of the truth. Timeline - see p2

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