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## British 'manouveres' to blame for 'Sunday' costs: SDLP



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By Staff reporter

A SENIOR member of the SDLP has defended the multi-million pound costs of the Bloody Sunday Inquiry, insisting that "various manouveres" by the British Ministry of Defence (MoD) is to blame for much of the spiralling bill.

North Belfast MLA Alban Maginness spoke out after it emerged that, to the end of April this year, the cost of the Lord Saville-chaired probe had reached Â£178.2 million.

Details of the expenditure were revealed by NIO minister Paul Goggins earlier this week. He also disclosed that the cost of various inquiries into Troubles-related deaths now tops Â£220 million.

DUP MP David Simpson has hit out at the costs: "We cannot overlook that every resource that is directed at the past is one that could also be used tacking and preventing crime today. It is important that we strike the right balance. These are difficult choices that we have to make in Northern Ireland, and they are sensitive since the hurt is still so raw."

However, Alban Maginness - the SDLP's justice spokesperson - has defended the need for the various inquiries, accusing the government of being to blame for much of the cost.

"It's important to remember the vast bulk of the cost is from the Bloody Sunday Inquiry and because of the various manoeuvres by the Ministry of Defence and its representatives, the cost of the inquiry

spiralled unnecessarily and has produced the figure we have," he said. "If there had been greater openness from the MoD, a lot of these costs could have been avoided.

"At the end of the day, any public inquiry will cost a lot of money, but the real value of an inquiry is the establishment of truth, and that is what is central to the whole process and that is certainly of great value to victims and society as a whole."

A spokeswoman for the Northern Ireland Office also defended the cost of the probes, pointing out that the government had capped the daily rate for senior counsel at Â£200 per hour and Â£100 per hour for junior counsel and limiting the time they can claim to 40 hours per week.

She said: "Inquiries act independently of government. Each chairman is responsible for the day-to-day running of the inquiry and the government has taken appropriate steps to ensure value for money."

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