



Dominic Lawson: Why I blame the Scots for the banking crisis

Ulster compensation scheme causes row

Reuters

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Plans to compensate the families of paramilitary fighters killed in Northern Ireland have caused anger on both sides of the sectarian divide.

A government-commissioned report is expected to propose a 12,000-pound payment for every family who lost a member in 30 years of violence in which more than 3,600 people were killed, local media said.

The Consultative Group on the Past will publish its official report tomorrow and has not commented on its content.

Unionists said a blanket compensation scheme would put paramilitaries who fought British rule in Northern Ireland on a par with civilian victims, police officers or British soldiers.

Catholic nationalists said London was trying to pay off victims instead of giving an account of its role in the conflict.

"We will not give our support to any proposal which would blur the line between the terrorist and the innocent victim," said Peter Robinson, head of the Democratic Unionist Party and First Minister in Northern Ireland's regional executive.

There was similar disappointment from those who have campaigned for a united Ireland.

"There are many victims' organisations that fear that the Eames/Bradley proposals will ... allow the British state to continue its policy ... of cover up and concealment," said Gerry Adams, president of the nationalist Sinn Fein party, a political ally of the IRA.

The Consultative Group on the Past is jointly chaired by a former Primate of the (Protestant) Church of Ireland, Lord Robin Eames, and Denis Bradley, a former Catholic priest and first deputy chairman of the Northern Ireland Policing Board. Both were nominated by the British government.

Legacy commission

A power-sharing pact between Northern Ireland's political foes in 2007 cemented a 1998 peace deal brokered by former Sen. George Mitchell, who was named this month as US President Barack Obama's Middle East envoy.

The independent IMC watchdog said last year the IRA's ruling army council was no longer operational and the group no longer posed a threat to peace.

The Ulster Volunteer Force, the most lethal of Northern Ireland's pro-British paramilitary groups, said in 2007 it would put "beyond reach" its weapons used against Catholics. The Independent Monitoring Commission said the UVF needed to go beyond its verbal pledge and fully disarm in a verifiable way as the IRA had done.

Isolated acts of violence still occur and the power-sharing executive did not meet for almost half of 2008 due to a row over the province's judiciary and police force.

The Relatives for Justice group campaigning for the families of victims of alleged state murders said the compensation debate missed the point of what they were looking for.

"For those families, their focus is not on compensation or reparation but principally the truth about what happened," director Mark Thompson told Reuters.


Wednesday's report will propose a "Legacy Commission" to investigate the conflict, but will not call for an amnesty or try to imitate South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission by holding public hearings, newspapers said.

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