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Politicians urged to help heal sectarian wounds

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Wednesday January 28 2009

Northern Ireland's political parties were challenged this evening to back unprecedented proposals aimed at healing the sectarian wounds left after decades of violence.

The British and Irish governments promised to carefully consider the €324 million plan to tackle the legacy of the Troubles, investigate its murders and battle sectarianism.

But tonight the men behind the blueprint pressed political parties in Belfast to support their plan, despite angry protests from victims opposed to the controversial proposal that all those bereaved - including the relatives of dead paramilitaries - receive a payment of almost €13,000.

Lord Robin Eames and Denis Bradley - closely associated with the search for peace and who led the Consultative Group on the Past - said they were trying to deal with the legacy of a conflict that could be charted back to 40, or even 400 years.

The British government commissioned the report in the face of the soaring cost of inquiries into the past and fears that deep divisions in society would poison the future.

British Prime Minister Gordon Brown today said he believed some of the key proposals would win cross-community support, but now he must decide whether or not to implement the plan.

But Mr Bradley warned: "Our two governments are very conscious of the DUP and Sinn Fein at this moment in time, because they want to keep the (power-sharing) agreement (at Stormont) going.

"If these two parties turn their back, then that will influence government.

"I would say to them (the parties): 'What's your alternative?'"

The group's report was launched today in Belfast, but victims of republican violence waved placards at the event and shouted slogans condemning the plan - sparking shouts from nationalists whose loved ones were killed by security forces.

Mr Bradley said today's angry scenes underlined the need to heal the open wounds and conflicting versions of history, which would otherwise dominate politics and burden the justice system.

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