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Groups' concern at consultation panel

(Aoife McKeever and William Graham, [Irish News](#))

Groups representing the families of those killed in the Troubles have voiced their concerns over the establishment of a consultation panel on the legacy of conflict.

In a letter to *The Irish News*, Margaret Urwin from Justice for the Forgotten, Paul O'Connor from the Pat Finucane Centre and Mark Thompson from Relatives for Justice, wrote that they had "serious concerns" over the setting up of the NIO initiative by former secretary of state Peter Hain as it has been "designed by one of the parties to the conflict", namely the British government.

The victims' representatives said they feared that an attempt would be made to "draw a line in the sand" and deny families the truth.

"We are disturbed by the failure to discuss this proposal in advance with victims' and survivors' groups, the context in which it was announced, the proposed narrow focus of the consultation and the lack of representation on the panel of those sectors," they said.

"In the lead-up to this announcement a number of individuals and organisations have been arguing forcefully that it is too expensive, or too dangerous, or impossible to deal with the past.

"The less than subtle message that has been given is that those who have lost loved ones should dry their proverbial eyes and 'move on'."

The representatives believe that the panel should have included more international involvement instead of just two advisers, representatives of the victims of the conflict appointed to the panel and should have included consultation in the Republic and included families of British soldiers killed.

Meanwhile, SDLP leader Mark Durkan welcomed the appointment of the panel headed by Lord Eames and Denis Bradley. Mr Durkan said there could be no justice in the denial of truth or of cover-up regarding the victims issue and the past.

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"It is essential that the way we deal with our past puts the interests of victims and survivors first," the SDLP leader said.

"There can be no justice in the denial of truth or in cover-up.

"The families of Bloody Sunday are entitled to expect that Saville will deliver the truth of what happened on that day.

"The family of Pat Finucane are entitled to expect action when it is announced

that there will be no prosecutions – when for years we were told that the reason there would not be a full and independent inquiry into his murder was in order to allow such prosecutions."

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