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Truth commission 'must be tailored to suit north'

By Staff reporter

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A truth commission to examine the bloody legacy of the Troubles must not follow South Africa's

'confrontational' model and should be held in private, victims' groups have said.

A coalition of organisations representing mainly nationalist victims of violence said any independent truth

recovery process must be tailored to the specific needs of families affected by the 35-year conflict.

An official panel chaired by former Church of Ireland primate Lord Eames and former Policing Board vice-

chairman Denis Bradley is looking at ways of dealing with the past.

The coalition warned against employing the model used in South Africa, where public hearings were held to

investigate past crimes.

“We are not calling for a South African-style confrontational truth and reconciliation commission with public hearings with alleged perpetrators getting up in rooms in front of hundreds of victims saying I did X, Y and Z,”

Paul O'Connor of the Pat Finucane Centre, one of the groups on the coalition, said.

“We are not calling for that. We are calling for a process that is tailor-made to our circumstances.

“We are talking about largely private hearings. We are talking about an organisation that can mediate that process of truth recovery from those who have it to those who need it and deserve it – the families who have lost loved ones right across the board.”

The Eames-Bradley panel is examining the possibility of granting an amnesty for those prepared to admit their involvement in Troubles killings through any truth process.

Mr O'Connor said he was opposed to the idea of a full amnesty.

However, he said those willing to contribute should be given immunity in regard to any evidence they gave to the commission.

Other groups included in the coalition at Stormont were Relatives for Justice, Justice for the Forgotten, the Ardoyne Commemoration Project, An Fhirinne and Firinne Fermanagh.

Protestant victims' campaigner Willie Frazer described the Stormont rally as a “thinly veiled political stunt aimed to influence present direction of government policy”.

Meanwhile, the consultative group on the past emphasised that no decisions on how to deal with the bloody legacy of the troubles had been taken.

Ahead of a meeting with Ian Paisley and Martin McGuinness, Lord Eames and Mr Bradley issued a joint statement flatly denying that the body had already drawn up any recommendations.

“It has to be emphasised and stated without reservation that the group has yet to meet together to look at all the suggestions which have been put forward,” they said.

“We are listening, engaging and treating all as equally as we can.

“Any suggestions that ‘an interim report’ has been written or that the group is adopting a particular political agenda, or that decisions have already been made, are completely untrue.”