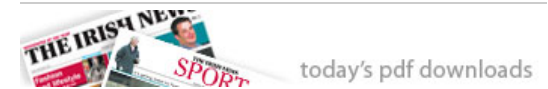


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Victims post turning to farce

Pro fide et patria

Editorial

23/02/08

The story behind the attempts to establish an effective and appropriate commission for victims in Northern Ireland has not been a happy one and it is threatening to turn into a full-blown farce.

Even before it was announced last month that what had always previously been envisaged as a post for a single individual would instead require the appointment of four commissioners, with equal status and salaries, the credibility of the entire exercise was very much on the line.

It has now emerged that the commissioners and the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) are on completely different wavelengths over the legal basis on which the initiative is expected to operate.

One commissioner, Mike Nesbitt, said in the course of a television panel discussion on Thursday night that legal loopholes were preventing him and his colleagues from carrying out a central part of their responsibilities.

Mr Nesbitt said he had been advised not to meet victims or their families because such activities did not have legal backing and were not covered by insurance.

Two Stormont executive ministers who participated in the same programme appeared to be entirely unaware of this background but indicated that they intended to look into the matter urgently.

Then yesterday an OFMDFM statement suggested there was no bar on meetings between victims and commissioners, pending the drafting of new legislation scheduled for later this year.

However, it seems that the appointment of the four commissioners was still confirmed at a stage when existing legislation stipulated that only a single person was entitled to take on the role.

It all represents a sorry mess which

can only cause further despondency and disillusionment among surviving victims and their relatives.

The four commissioners are all respected figures but they face a massive task in rescuing a project which has stumbled

from one crisis to another over the last three years.