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Thursday, January 29, 2009

Eames says £12,000 is a way to tell families 'sorry for your troubles'

[In this section »](#)

- [Raft of proposals to address Troubles](#)
- [The Consultative Group on the Past: main recommendations](#)
- [Brown 'will never forget' thousands of victims in North](#)
- ['No rush to judgment' on plans urge Martin and Woodward](#)

GERRY MORIARTY, Northern Editor

PAYMENTS: THE PROPOSED £12,000 (€13,000) payment to the families of everyone killed in the Troubles has been described as a way of society saying to the families of those killed: "We are sorry for your troubles", Lord Eames said yesterday.

Speaking at the launch of the report of the Consultative Group on the Past, which he co-authored, Lord Eames said all members of the group knew the payment would be controversial but nonetheless felt compelled to make the proposal.

He told those attending the launch in the Europa Hotel in Belfast: "This is not compensation by another name. It is the acknowledgment of their loss and of their pain. With this gesture we are attempting to use the inept but understood ritual of telling them 'we are sorry for your troubles'," said Lord Eames.

Explaining how the group had come to the decision on the payment, he said: "You may be surprised at the number of people who told us that they received little or no acknowledgment of their loss during all the years of the Troubles. In our consultation process, victims, victims' groups, widows of security force members, politicians and individuals pressed us to make a recommendation which would ensure that their grief is recognised.

"These people told us how hurt they were that no one in authority ever recognised or marked their loss. They will never stand up in a public meeting. They will never stand in front of a camera or microphone and say that they agree with this recommendation. Nor should they have to," he added.

"They fear it may sound like they are putting a monetary value on their loved one. It is not the monetary value these people seek."

He continued: "This small gesture encapsulates a conflict which has lasted 40 years or 400 years and is still as prevalent today as it has ever been. We are still fighting about who was right or righter, who had moral justification, and who had God on their side. And we are still terrified that if we acknowledge the grief and the moral position of

others that it will dilute our own. But as one leading unionist said to us, "There is no difference in a mother's tears."

Lord Eames and his co-author Denis Bradley both stressed the sum was a "recognition payment" similar to the "acknowledgment payment" made by the Government's Remembrance Commission – which was also paid to all next of kin of people in the Republic regardless of whether those killed were paramilitaries.

So far, over 497 people in the Republic have received payments totalling €3,871,893, with some payments of €15,000 divided between members of families. The criterion for payment was that the deceased person was normally resident in the State at the time of fatal injury or was fatally injured in the South.

Equally, Mr Bradley said it would be "anathema" to compare the tears of the mother of a paramilitary killed while involved in violence to the tears of the mother of another victim who had no involvement in violence.

"The people that actually died and the families that were left are not fully responsible for all the trouble in Northern Ireland," he said.

Of the £12,000 proposed payment, Mr Bradley added: "This is not a great gesture but it is a gesture at least. It recognises that you did have a loss that I didn't have."

Mr Bradley also made clear that in its overall proposals, the consultative group was attempting to move Northern Ireland beyond focusing on a "hierarchy of victims". Both Lord Eames and Mr Bradley in their report also made the point that under the Victims and Survivors (Northern Ireland) Order 2006, the families of paramilitaries constitute victims of the Troubles.

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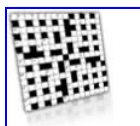
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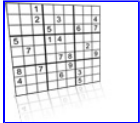
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