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Lord Saville declines to explain inquiry report delay

The head of the Bloody Sunday Inquiry has told a Westminster Committee he cannot meet it to explain the delay in his 10-year investigation.

The Northern Ireland Affairs Committee said it was disappointed Lord Saville declined to give evidence on why the final report of his inquiry had been delayed for a further year.

Lord Saville said he could not discuss the issue without divulging sensitive details of his investigation.

Thirteen people died after paratroopers opened fire during a civil rights march in Derry in January 1972, while a further person later died of their injuries.

The committee today said it had received a letter from Lord Saville in which he said he could make no detailed comment ahead of the release of his final report which is now expected in the autumn of 2009.

Lord Saville wrote: "I understand from your letter that the purpose would be to examine reasons for the delay recently announced in the final publication of the inquiry's report and the continuing costs arising therefrom.

"You inform me that the Committee would not wish in any way to inquire into the details of the inquiry itself and that it is fully aware that it would be inappropriate to seek to do so.

"However, without going into such details it would not be possible for me to say more to the Committee than I have already said publicly, namely that this has been an inquiry involving nearly two thousand five hundred witnesses and tens of thousands of documents; and that the Tribunal are determined to deal fairly, accurately and thoroughly with all the many issues to which it has given rise, as they are sure Parliament intended when setting up the inquiry.

"In these circumstances I regret to say that I must decline the invitation."

Sir Patrick Cormack, chairman of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, said he was disappointed at the response, but that he respected

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Lord Saville's position.

Sir Patrick added: "I must make it very plain, however, that the Committee is extremely disappointed and concerned at this further delay and the consequential costs, and at the inevitable worry that gives to many people.

"We sincerely hope that this will be the last delay and that the inquiry's report will be published before the end of 2009."

Last month Lord Saville said his report would not be ready until late next year.

The Bloody Sunday inquiry has so far cost more than £181 million, making it the longest and most expensive inquiry in Britain's legal history.

About half of this cost was for legal services, while the first witness to the inquiry was heard in November 2000 and the final testimony given in January 2005.

PA

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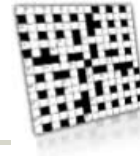
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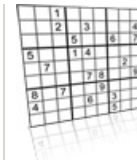
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