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 6. [Weather](#)
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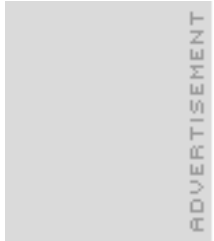
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Tuesday, April 17, 2007

[Previous Day](#)

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- [World](#) |
- [Irish](#) |
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- [Sports](#)
- | [News Quiz](#)

[Next Day](#) 

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DUP meeting disappoints McCartneys

The sisters of an IRA murder victim said their hopes of a breakthrough in their tireless justice campaign dimmed today after meeting the Reverend Ian Paisley.

During talks with Northern Ireland's First Minister designate, Robert McCartney's family sought any new details of republican co-operation with the inquiry into the killing outside a central Belfast bar.

But Catherine McCartney emerged from the half hour encounter at Parliament Buildings, Stormont to say: "Everything is falling in place for the political establishment and the people in it, yet people like Robert are just collateral. "Victims will just have to live with it."

Although one man has been charged with the murder, the family believe at least a dozen people were involved in the attack in January 2005.

Ms McCartney and her sister Paula questioned the Democratic Unionist leader on whether he had secured any assurances from Sinn Fein about their brother's stabbing.

The DUP have identified the murder of Mr McCartney, a 33-year-old father of two, as an acid test of republican backing for the police service.

With an IRA gang blamed for the killing outside Magennis' bar and subsequent cover-up, Sinn Fein had refused at the time to explicitly urge any witnesses to speak to detectives.

Their position changed in January when party leader Gerry Adams instructed anyone with information on the knifing to go to investigating officers.

As Sinn Fein and the DUP prepare to share power next month, the McCartney sisters had hoped Mr Paisley could provide new hope for a campaign that has already taken them to the White House and European Parliament.

But the meeting delivered little progress, even though the DUP chief gave them a pledge to keep pressing republicans on their behalf. A major difficulty involves the so-called retrospective sanctioning of the murder by the cover-up, when witnesses were allegedly sworn to silence and the bar forensically cleaned, the sisters believe.

"They (republicans) have bound themselves to this code of honour," Catherine McCartney said. "This is supposed to be some form of litmus test of their attitude to the rule of law but they have failed it miserably by offering no co-operation. "It doesn't appear that situation is going to change.

"Dr Paisley said that there were difficulties within the republican organisation. Very senior members would have difficulties. "But he has said he will continue to push and pressure."

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