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Last Updated: Monday, January 19, 2009, 11:49

## Former RUC chief to appear at Nelson inquiry

Former Northern Ireland Chief Constable Sir Ronnie Flanagan will this afternoon give evidence at a public inquiry into the murder of solicitor Rosemary Nelson.

The inquiry is examining claims security force members played a role in her death in 1999, during which time Sir Ronnie headed the then Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC).

Mrs Nelson (40) was killed in a loyalist bomb attack. Before her death she had accused RUC officers of making threats against her, though police deny wrongdoing in the case.

Sir Ronnie, who now heads Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, led the RUC and oversaw its transformation into the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

He is scheduled to give evidence for three days at the inquiry's hearings in the Interpoint building in central Belfast.

Sir Ronnie is likely to be questioned on whether the RUC or other state agencies had any knowledge of a paramilitary threat to Mrs Nelson.

Queries have also been raised over the police handling of the allegation that RUC officers threatened the solicitor.

The mother-of-three had driven only yards from her home in Lurgan, Co Armagh, when the device beneath her car exploded on March 15th, 1999. The attack was claimed by the Red Hand Defenders, which was seen as a cover name for larger loyalist paramilitary groups.

Her allegations of security force intimidation secured international attention when she addressed a committee of the US Congress just months before she died. Concerns for her safety were also raised by United Nations (UN) official Param Cumaraswamy.

Mr Cumaraswamy was the UN special rapporteur charged with the task of monitoring the independence of lawyers and judges around the world. He carried out high profile investigations into the treatment of lawyers in Northern Ireland.

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In the past his observations caused controversy and a BBC *Panorama* programme in the wake of Mrs Nelson's murder profiled allegations levelled by the UN official in the years prior to Mrs Nelson's death.

Sir Ronnie strongly denied that during a meeting with the then RUC chief and senior colleagues, Mr Kumaraswamy was told some lawyers may be working to a paramilitary agenda.

The RUC has denied the claim and the former chief constable has pointed to the moves made in the aftermath of Mrs Nelson's murder to establish an investigating team made up, not just of RUC officers, but officers brought from Britain.

No one has been convicted for Mrs Nelson's murder.

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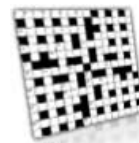
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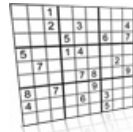
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