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Sections

1. [The Irish Times](#)
2. [Breaking News](#)
3. [Sport](#)
4. [Business](#)
5. [Technology](#)
6. [Weather](#)
7. [In Focus](#)
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- [Photosales](#)
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- [Irish Times Training](#)
- [Mobile](#)
- [Reader Offers](#)



Wednesday, June 20, 2007

[Previous Day](#)

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

[Next Day](#)

Last Updated: 20/06/2007 17:14

Troubles Commissioner to be named

A commissioner for victims of Northern Ireland's troubles could be appointed by the power sharing executive at Stormont within weeks, Martin McGuinness said today.

During his first joint question-and-answer session with MLAs in the Assembly alongside First Minister Ian Paisley, the Deputy First Minister told their Stormont scrutiny committee: "In looking to the future, we cannot ignore that we are emerging from conflict.

"We wish to give a high priority to matters affecting victims and survivors.

"A key part of our approach in the short term will be the appointment of a victims and survivors commissioner which we hope to make before the recess."

Northern Ireland Assembly members will begin the recess on July 7. The appointment of a Victims Commissioner capable of commanding the confidence of victims of republican, loyalist and security force violence will be one of the most tricky decisions the DUP First Minister and Sinn Fein Deputy First Minister will face.

The choice of the previous Interim Victims Commissioner Bertha McDougall by Northern Ireland Secretary Peter Hain was highly controversial and challenged in the courts by Brenda Downes, whose husband Sean was killed by a Royal Ulster Constabulary plastic bullet in 1984.

Mrs Downes claimed the appointment of Bertha McDougall was a political one.

Mrs McDougall was allowed to complete her work despite a High Court judge's reservations about how the appointment were made.

She recommended in a report in January that there should be a more flexible fund for victims to replace the Memorial Fund and the setting up of a victims' forum.

Mr Paisley told the Committee of First and Deputy First Minister's deputy chair Naomi Long the executive was proceeding carefully because of the past experience of Mrs McDougall's appointment.

"My deputy has said we do want to press on with the Victims Commissioner's appointment but it has not been as easy might seem because the past administration from another place was not an expert in this as we know," the First Minister told the Alliance Party deputy leader.

"Certain decisions cost litigation against them. So we don't intend to get into that.

"We intend to get a good clean job and make it easy for the first appointment not to have to carry any baggage with them in that job."

When pressed by the committee chair, Ulster Unionist deputy leader Danny Kennedy about their intention to appoint a commissioner before the recess, Mr Paisley and Mr McGuinness said: "Yes" and "Absolutely."

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12-18 °C

TOMORROW



11-18 °C

SATURDAY



10-17 °C

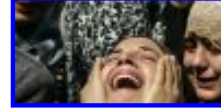
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