



Thu, Jan 25, 2007

Sections

1. [The Irish Times](#)
2. [Breaking News](#)
3. [Sport](#)
4. [Business](#)
5. [Technology](#)
6. [Weather](#)
7. [In Focus](#)
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- [World](#) |
- [Business](#) |
- [Sports](#) |
- [Technology](#)

[Next Day](#)

Last Updated: 24/01/2007 22:02

Ahern calls for British action on collusion

Minister for Foreign Affairs Dermot Ahern has called on the British government to take action to deal with the issue of collusion between the security forces in the North and loyalist paramilitaries.

Speaking in Dundalk after a meeting with Sinn Féin and the SDLP today, Mr Ahern said the powers of the Police Ombudsman Nuala O'Loan should be strengthened and that the full rigours of the law should be applied to make those responsible accountable.



Police Ombudsman Nuala O'Loan

Mr Ahern said the Government was not calling for the resignation of former RUC chief constable Sir Ronnie Flanagan, who held the top post for part of the period covered by the ombudsman's report into collusion during the 1990s.

Ms O'Loan's report published yesterday said collusion between loyalists and RUC Special Branch in north Belfast between 1991 and 2003 could not have happened without "knowledge and support" of the most senior officers.

The report found collusion in up to 15 murders carried out by a UVF gang and concluded that an RUC informant - identified by reliable sources as jailed informer Mark Haddock - was a "serial killer".

Both Sinn Féin and the SDLP want the former RUC chief removed from his current position as Chief Inspector of Constabulary in Britain in light of the findings.

Sir Ronnie's position attracted further controversy this evening when the Labour Party said the Government must explain his role in the appointment of former Boston police commissioner, Kathleen O'Toole as head of the new Garda Inspectorate.

Ruairi Quinn said he was assured by Tánaiste and Minister for Justice Michael McDowell there was nothing untoward about her appointment.

He questioned why Sir Ronnie was given such a role when the Tánaiste knew his role in the RUC would come under scrutiny in Ms O'Loan's report.

Ulster Unionist leader Sir Reg Empey claimed the Ombudsman's report has had a corrosive effect on the political process in Northern Ireland.

He said: "The whole context in which the report was released is part of the problem - leaks, speculation and with large swathes of one side of the community seeing it as one-sided approach."

SDLP leader Mark Durkan has written to British Prime Minister Tony Blair urging him to sack him if he does not stand down.

However, Mr Flanagan insisted he knew nothing about the disclosures made by Mrs O'Loan.

Denying any suggestion that he refused to cooperate with the three-year inquiry, he said: "With respect to the specific matters dealt with in the Ombudsman's report, at no time did I have any knowledge, or evidence, of officers at any level behaving in the ways that have been described.

"I would find such conduct to be abhorrent, and if such behaviour took place my hope would be that it would be the subject of criminal or disciplinary proceedings."

Raymond McCord, who triggered the Ombudsman's investigation with his complaint that Special Branch agents beat his son Raymond to death in 1997, Mr McGuinness and Mr Durkan were all scathing about the former chief constable.

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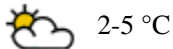
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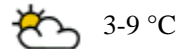


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