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## Call to put time limit on Troubles crime inquiries

[Henry McDonald](#), Ireland editor

- [The Observer](#), Sunday 18 January 2009

There should be no more "Bloody Sunday"-style inquiries into past controversies from the Troubles, a major report into how to deal with 35 years of conflict will recommend.

The Observer has learnt that the report's authors, led by former Church of Ireland Primate Robin Eames and former police board vice-chairman Denis Bradley, will also come out against establishing a "hierarchy of victims". In addition the report it will impose a time-limit of three to four years on all police investigations into unsolved crimes from the Troubles.

The group's report will be published at a press conference in Belfast on 28 January. However sources at Stormont told the Observer this weekend that the report will seek to draw a line under the past and move Northern Ireland away from what they described as an "inquiry culture".

The Bloody Sunday inquiry is the longest and most expensive inquiry in British legal history. It is investigating events surrounding the fatal shooting of 13 civilians at a civil rights demonstration in Derry in February 1972 by the Parachute Regiment. The tribunal has cost more than £181m.

The report was due to be completed by the end of autumn 2007. However, the law lord in charge

of the inquiry, Lord Saville, has announced it will not be completed until the end of this year.

Neither Eames nor Bradley will comment in advance of their report. But senior sources at Stormont said yesterday that one of the most contentious aspects of the report will be the imposition of a time-frame on the criminal investigations into unsolved crimes.

"Unionists will be unhappy that after three or four years investigations will be wound up into these crimes," said the source. "It means many unsolved murders will remain unsolved. They will be less concerned about the end of the 'inquiry culture' that has expanded massively since the peace process."

On the recommendation that there be no hierarchy of victims, one source at Stormont said this was designed more to end the impression created during the public inquiries that some of those killed in the Troubles were more important than others.

The imposition of a time-frame on police investigations will have a major impact on the historical enquiries team, a separate police unit that is currently investigating unsolved murders. The team has several hundred officers working on unsolved cases. One of its first major operations was the investigation into the October 2000 murder of Ulster Defence Association member Tommy English during a feud with the rival Ulster Volunteer Force. Two men are currently in custody in connection with the killing, including UVF north Belfast commander and former RUC Special Branch agent Mark Haddock.

All paramilitary organisations, both loyalist and republican, have been opposed to any expansion of the team's role in exploring past Troubles crimes. It is estimated that more than two thirds of all deaths connected to the conflict between 1969 and 1997 remain unsolved.



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