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News

Probe that sparked Stevens is re-ignited

Sunday, December 31, 2006

By Alan Murray

The brutal UDA murder that sparked the long-running Stevens Inquiry may be re-opened by Police Ombudsman Nuala O'Loan.

Mrs O'Loan will be asked to launch an investigation into the failure of the PSNI to conduct a criminal inquiry into allegations that soldiers stationed at Ballykinlar in the early 1990s passed information to loyalist paramilitaries.

The Relatives for Justice group will formally request the probe next month.

And her inquiry could examine the UDA murder of Co Down poultry processor Loughlin Maginn, who claimed he had been harassed by Army and police patrols in the 18 months before his August 1989 murder.

The family of the Rathfriland father-of-four claimed that, on one occasion, a UDR soldier threatened to kill him at a checkpoint.

Denials that Mr Maginn was a member of the IRA led to UDA chiefs releasing a security force montage of the murdered man.

The image was plastered on walls in north and west Belfast along with photocopies of other photo-montages which, the UDA said, it had been passed by members of the security forces.

The Stevens Inquiry, which was launched weeks later, brought current PSNI Chief Constable Sir Hugh Orde to Ulster to run day-to-day inquiries.

Earlier this month the PSNI issued a statement saying it was conducting an inquiry into allegations made by a former UDR soldier that he was passed the names of suspected IRA men operating in Newry and south Armagh around the time of the Maginn murder.

But the PSNI later issued a second, contradictory statement, stating that no investigation into the former UDR man's claims was being conducted.

Now Relatives for Justice says it will make a formal complaint about the police decision when it meets Mrs O'Loan in the new year.

Director Mark Thompson said there was considerable concern about the conflicting police statements.

Said Mr Thompson: "We are concerned, firstly, that these allegations of collusion, which are contained in a formal witness statement, are not going to be probed.

"Secondly, we are concerned at the stark difference in the content of the two statements issued by the PSNI on this matter.

"Thirdly, we believe that the allegations merit a broader investigation into what collusion was going on in this area between soldiers and police and loyalist paramilitaries."

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