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News

War of words

Politicians must now show real leadership

Sunday, January 13, 2008

By Brian Rowan

An international expert says Northern Ireland's debate on its past needs political leadership, and that people should "brace themselves" for "a long, long, discussion".

Dr Brandon Hamber - a clinical psychologist - worked with victims who testified before South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

He is now works at the University of Ulster and is chairman of the Belfast-based Healing Through Remembering project, which will soon make its response to the Eames/Bradley Consultative Group.

That group found itself at the centre of a political storm after it was reported that it might ask the British Government to formally declare it fought a "war" with the IRA.

It was further suggested the group could recommend an "amnesty" to allow all of those involved in past violence to come forward and tell their stories.

"We need a good process and a good commitment to that process," Brandon Hamber said on the question of addressing the past.

That must be about "creating stability and ultimately building deeper foundations for a lasting peace".

He continued: "The issues need to be discussed. How do you find the way that that can take place? How do you find the proper place?"

He said Northern Ireland's politicians have an important contribution to make to the debate.

"They have to demonstrate a sense of leadership and vision," he continued - and they must discuss the issue of the past "in a rational way" that helps "frame the debate". He said: "There needs to be framing. Clearly these things need to be discussed at a political level.

"We can and need to talk about these things. People have to brace themselves that this discussion is a long, long, discussion."

In its report, "Making Peace with the Past", the Healing Through Remembering project sets out five possible options on a way forward.

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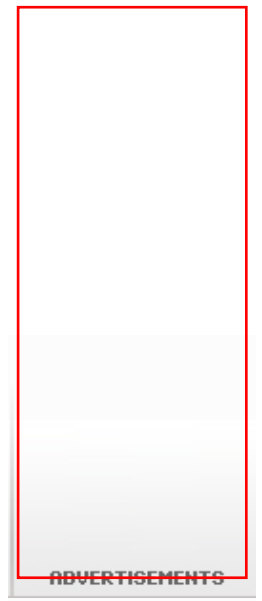
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