

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY
Monday 3 March 2008

Ministerial Statement
Commissioner for Victims and Survivors

Sources: <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/record/reports2007/080303.htm>

5. **Mr Hilditch** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the planned working relationship between the department and the Commissioner for Victims and Survivors. (AQO 2323/08)

The First Minister: We recently announced our decision to appoint four commissioners designate and to introduce legislation to establish a commission for victims and survivors. The commission will be independent of Government in its day-to-day operation. Our Department will sponsor the commission, and it is intended that a work programme, which will give a strategic context to their work, will be agreed with the commissioners.

Mr Hilditch: Will the First Minister inform the House of the position of the legislation that is required to establish the new victims' commission?

The First Minister: All I can say is that that matter is under consideration, and we hope that we will soon be in a position to sponsor the legislation in the House that will be necessary to carry out the objectives that we have in mind.

Mrs Long: In the same vein as the previous question, will the First Minister tell the House what planned working relationships within the commission for victims and survivors are envisaged by his Department? Will he give the House some indication about the status of the current victims' commissioners designate, who have been appointed but who do not have a legislative framework in which to work? What limitations, if any, does that place on their activities?

The First Minister: The legislation will deal with the matters that the honourable lady mentioned, and they need to be dealt with.

I regret that there is a hold-up, and I hope that it will be overcome as quickly as possible, so that the needs of those victims can be dealt with.

Mr Burnside: Will the First Minister corporately, on behalf of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, confirm that it is the opinion of that unitary office, that those who took part as members of proscribed, illegal, terrorist organisations — whether republican or loyalist — in the Troubles of the last 35 years will not be defined as victims or relatives, or receive taxpayers' money, and that the concentration of taxpayers' money that might be devoted to that purpose, will be for the innocent victims of terrorism and members of the security forces and their families?

The First Minister: I hope that the honourable Member will believe me this time. I have already answered that question, and I answered it as I have always done. We are talking about victims, and not about those who made them victims. It is the victims that we will look after.