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DURKAN - NO CONSISTENT THINKING ON VICTIMS COMMISSION FROM OFMDFM

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Speaking during this mornings Assembly debate on the Victims Commissioners Bill supporting amendment number one SDLP Leader Mark Durkan outlined a number of flaws in the legislation brought forward by the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister

Mr Durkan stated:

“The legislation as it stands leaves the option for OFMDFM to appoint more than four commissioners, they might want to have part time commissioners, and the argument that there may be now a chief commissioner who may be supported by part time commissioners as well as the other commissioners makes a complete nonsense of the arguments we were hearing from those who are proposing this bill over the past couple of weeks - that there could not be a chief commissioner, that there had to be four equal commissioners otherwise there would be a hierarchy of commissioners and that would mean a hierarchy of victims. Now we are told there could be an even bigger and longer possible hierarchy of commissioners and part time commissioners.

This shows that there is no clear, consistent, thinking on the part of the parties who have given us this bill and that is what the debate on this amendment is flushing out. We heard in the course of the debate in this amendment the problems that victims face. What we did not hear was what this bill would actually do about any of those problems because this commission and these commissioners won't actually have any powers to take on any such cases or investigate any such cases as this bill has been drawn so narrowly.

The Human Rights Commission and the Equality Commission have a number of commissioners and chief commissioners, but there are very clear powers and functions – they have the Paris Principles attached to them in terms of the powers that they have as a state created body dealing with human rights issues. This commission is absolutely bereft of such powers. Nothing in this bill tells us how things are going to be dealt with in a proper way. The one thing we are being told is that there may be more commissions, more commissioners but no substantive actions or interventions. We are not told what say or sway the commission will have over its budget. Why can the parties who are asking us to accept four commissioners not accept a cap on four commissioners so that its resources are not consumed by the commission itself but as far as possible go to reach victims and better improve their circumstances and their needs.”

ENDS

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