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## MAGINNESS: SECRET INQUESTS OUT OF THE QUESTION

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SDLP Justice Spokesperson Alban Maginness said he is alarmed by media reports that the British government is considering proposals for inquests to be held in secret.

He said: “Provisions contained in a new counter-terrorism bill would allow the state to withhold evidence from families of the deceased, to deny a jury inquest and even to remove a jury that is already sitting if it gets too close to uncomfortable information. Secretary of State Shaun Woodward is said to be considering extending the provisions to Northern Ireland. I want to lay down a very clear marker that this is out of the question. It will be fought and defeated.

“We have been here before. The Special Powers Act also contained provisions for inquests to be held in secret or simply banned, and for fifty years that was also done in the name of counter-terrorism. Even with current legislation we have had a series of inquests postponed indefinitely because the British state refused to provide or disclose evidence, and coroners are still in dispute with police and security agencies decades after.

“We must not go down this road. We must not settle for devolution of emasculated justice. This society needs truth and transparency and an end to shady groups deciding what the rest of us can be told. We know from hard experience that so-called tough anti-terrorist action only plays into the hands of the enemies of democracy because it saps the faith of ordinary people in political action. In this 40th anniversary year of the launch of the Civil Rights campaign, we must say a firm no to anti-democratic legislation.”

ENDS

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