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## O'LOAN ADDRESSES ASSEMBLY ON VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS

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*That this Assembly urges the Executive to implement the recommendations of the final report by the Interim Commissioner for Victims and Survivors, entitled 'Support for Victims and Survivors: Addressing the Human Legacy'. Mr D Kennedy/Mr T Elliott*

“Deputy Speaker, may I congratulate Mr Kennedy and Mr Elliot for bringing this motion before us today. It was unhelpful that there were, that there are, those who saw the issue of victims as belonging to one or other community. This was ridiculous and led to many problems which are still to be resolved. But, like the Report in question, the very fact that Unionists and Nationalists are discussing the issue is a step towards this resolution.

I will begin by drawing attention to the urgency that we now meet with regard to the Report's full implementation. Amongst the most important of the Recommendations, to me, is that which advocates a better replacement for the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund by the end of 2007. We are now in July, and our first Recess is approaching. The harmony with which the NIMF is phased out, and its replacement developed, will impact on the success of what is to come. Therefore, I urge the Executive to take note of this, and to act without hesitation.

The ideas contained in this report are balanced, incisive and stand to benefit us all. They do not depend upon whatever model of truth recovery we adopt. And so, I urge the First and Deputy First Ministers not to brush this debate off by saying we'll wait for the report of the Consultative Group on the past. That would not be acceptable, honest, or in anyone's interest. Except perhaps the naked agenda of the British Government. But certainly not the interest of Victims themselves, and that is what must come first.

I stand to be corrected by the author, but I think a great part of the message of this Report is that much is being done, but that it could be done better. The work that has been done, though, has been done mostly by the community and the voluntary sectors. It would be better if it were better coordinated. And this is where we ought to have the expertise to assist. Not to interfere. But to support, and to assist. And since we have already a financial interest at stake, let us turn to maximising the return on that investment.

That means taking aspects of a business model to the structure of a process based on decidedly non-financial costs. We talk a lot about human capital being our greatest resource, and the role of government in directing it. Nowhere is this more true than in the area of Victims' and Survivors' issues. The investment we make has to be perceived as available to all to really be as such. So we must structure the whole field into something that will have the trust of all communities here. That means maximising the independence of the coordinators of the field. And it means resourcing them to carry out what they do so much better than we ever could. And that is exactly what Mrs McDougall has recommended.

The other central message of the report revolves around the need for a Victims' and Survivors' Forum. The optimum model for this is certainly one that is independent, effective and inclusive. We have seen great progress made in the area of equality as both communities begin to realise they have something to gain from its realisation. This must also be the case with acknowledging and addressing the needs of Victims. So I welcome the humility of the Commissioner in stating that her office should not have a lasting guiding role; I welcome too her pragmatism, which led her to say that that will be necessary to begin.

I hope too, that this Forum provides a sense of permanency to the admittedly transitional work being carried out in this area. There are a number of extremely devoted workers who have gained invaluable expertise, and have shared it with many. I would like to think that, in becoming members of this Forum, they would become members of a Forum of global repute, and one which could help to heal those whose pain comes from blows similar to our own. The Forum could contribute valuably to the North becoming famous for something much more productive than violence. And it could be the root of fruitful international

relationships.

If we act on this, and the Executive too, and we all do so without delay, we can begin to approach the issue of Victims with some hope of moving things forward. The Report contained some horrifying statistics on the numbers of injured and bereaved among us, and they made one thing clear. We are all of us products of the troubles. We all need help. But let's begin with those who need it the most, those most sorely feeling the hurt of what we did and failed to do. I urge the House to support this motion, and in doing so to support the very future of this project we are engaging in."

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