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O'LOAN - UNRESOLVED DISAPPEARED IS A SCANDAL AND A SHAME

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SDLP North Antrim Assembly Member Declan O'Loan has stated that the current unresolved Disappeared cases are a national scandal and shame.

Offering his support to the Presumption of Death Bill, Mr O'Loan said there was a moral responsibility on anyone with any information to come forward.

However, Mr O'Loan said he was concerned that the current Bill placed no duty of disclosure on the Government bodies or agencies.

He said: “The Presumption of Death Bill recently discussed at the Assembly is a serious issue as its purpose is to confer on the High Court the power to issue a declaration that a missing person is presumed to have died if there is evidence suggesting they are dead and they have not be known to be alive for seven years.

“It is important to note that the origins of this Bill relates to those known as ‘The Disappeared,’ while of course it deals with all cases of presumed death.

‘The Disappeared’ are people murdered by various paramilitary groups, mainly the IRA, and whose remains have not been discovered.

“It is a scandal and a shame that this is still the case today. There is a heavy moral responsibility on anyone, including people in the Assembly who may have information about those cases to come forward.

“These murders were grievously wrong and the families of the Disappeared are entitled to see their relatives’ remains recovered so that they might provide them with a proper burial.

“Nine families remain in that situation, and the Presumption of Death Bill highlights a continuing situation that should not exist.

“In the absence of that proper closure, some of those families have said that they want to be able to register the death of their family member. That is not possible under current law without the existence of a body — hence the current Bill, which will also serve other unfortunate cases.

“But I wish to raise one major concern. This Bill places no duty of disclosure on Government bodies or agencies of information that relates to whether the missing person might be presumed dead. That is a serious and erroneous omission. It is essential that there should be such an obligation, and it should apply in particular to the police, Army and security services.”

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