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Margaret Ritchie MLA

Cllr Eamonn O'Neill

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SDLP DEMANDS LOUGHINISLAND KILLINGS PROBE

Two leading members of the SDLP have called for the widest possible probe into the slaughter of six members of the public as they watched a World Cup football match in Loughinisland during 1994.

Margaret Ritchie and Eamonn O'Neill said that the Police Ombudsman's Office now must prioritise as a matter of the utmost urgency the completion of its investigation into the Loughinisland murders. Currently the Historic Enquiries team is compiling a report into the Heights Bar murders before submitting its findings to the Ombudsman's Office.

But both SDLP representatives said the known links with the Haddock case, which have been highlighted by Foreign Affairs Minister Dermot Ahern today, require an immediate extension of the current investigation. Eamonn O'Neill said.

"The latest shocking revelations contained in the Ombudsman's report into the activity of a UVF gang in North Belfast, and the immunity provided to those killers, have sent shock waves throughout the entire community. We want to know how deep and wide those links with South Down and Loughinisland were.

"We know the name of the renegade Catholic killer who was inducted into the gang controlled by Mark Haddock. We know that he has strong links with the Down area. But equally this information is now the subject of an investigation that will come under the scrutiny of Nuala O'Loan and her dedicated team of investigators."

Mr. O'Neill pointed out that three years ago his office was able to provide the detailed compilation of material, including interviews with relatives of those killed and many of those injured in the shooting at the bar.

"It was this extensive volume of evidence that started the Ombudsman's Enquiry when it was presented in July of 2004," Mr. O'Neill added. Margaret Ritchie and Eamonn O'Neill said the families they had worked with and represented over the years since the Heights Bar slaughter "had never wanted to have the murders of six innocent people" used as a lever for political advantage.

Ms Ritchie said that until now she had refused to link her family connections with the tragedy in order not to be seen as trying to exploit that relationship.

"The Loughinisland killings appalled the entire world with the extent of the savagery and cruelty that was inflicted by a Loyalist gun gang. It brought together all decent people in condemnation. It never was used as a tool for political advantage during the terrible days of June 1994. It should not be used as such in present circumstances. I know that the community of Loughinisland and the families that I have continued to work closely with just want answers to unanswered questions. They want to be able to at least start to put the grieving process behind them by getting some form of official closure on the Heights Bar killings," Ms Ritchie said.

Both Ms Ritchie and Councillor Eamonn O'Neill pointed out that they had been fighting for years in terms of seeking to get to the truth behind one of the worst episodes of sectarian murder.

"We have worked with all the various agencies involved. We have been prepared to ask and demand answers on the most difficult of issues. This stance has never wavered. We have never been selective in choosing those that we want answers from. It is all too easy to stand and snipe from the comfort of the sidelines without having the courage to be in at the cutting edge of total community involvement."

ENDS

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