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Alliance calls for Commission to look at how to deal with the past

6.40.00pm BST (GMT +0100) Sun 8th Oct 2006



Alliance Leader, David Ford

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On the eve of the St. Andrews' Talks, the Alliance Party has written to the British and Irish Governments asking them to appoint an independent commission on the past and its legacy. The commission would be composed of domestic and international experts to consult, and make a series of recommendations which would address how to deal with

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outstanding issues relating to the past and its legacy, and their linkage to the promotion of reconciliation.

Alliance Party Leader, David Ford, commented: "One of the missing ingredients from the Northern Ireland Peace Process has been any comprehensive process for dealing with the past and its legacy. This is a common aspect to most processes internationally.

"Some may argue that focusing in on the past is counterproductive, keeps wounds open, and that society should move on. We disagree with this view. Addressing the past and its legacy is fundamental to the process of reconciliation and building a shared future. The failure to do this in a comprehensive and holistic manner is a barrier to political progress.

"To date, efforts to deal with the past and its legacy have been handled on a very piecemeal basis. These matters have been allowed to create further division. I firmly believe that only through the creation of a comprehensive approach can this tendency be countered.

"There have been some significant efforts to improve services to victims of our conflict. Also, civic society have been to the forefront in identifying and advocating different mechanisms for dealing with the past. However, it is time to bring these efforts together.

"A number of particular areas relating to the victims of violence should be seriously considered. These include memorials, a possible annual day of reflection and remembrance, a forum of testimonials, to enable victims to place their memories on record, and most crucially a mechanism to address truth recovery.

"But there are other legacies of the past to be dealt with, such as the fate of 'exiles' and the effect of a history of paramilitarism and division on some communities. All elements of society, including the state and the paramilitaries need to confront the legacy of past

actions.

"At this stage, it is important to focus first on the process. Victims have been neglected for too long. We need for some type of process to determine what can be done and what should be done.

"Alliance is proposing that the British and Irish Governments appoint a Commission of experts who would consult with the public, draw on international best practice, deliberate themselves, and produce a series of recommendations on what measures are suitable for Northern Ireland. Throughout this process, any commission should be guided by

the overarching objective of encouraging reconciliation within this society and building a shared future.

"In the Preparation for Government discussions, the past and its legacy was identified as a key issue. With the recent positive report from the IMC, and the St. Andrews' talks approaching, we believe that there is a final opportunity for Northern Ireland to begin to properly address the past and its legacy."

ENDS

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