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TUESDAY  
20/02/2007  
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**Police Board calls for truth**

A truth commission to deal with Northern Ireland's history of conflict should be an official priority.

By: Press Association

That is the view of the chief policing watchdog in Northern Ireland who is expected to make the call at an international conference in Belfast today.

Professor Sir Desmond Rea, who prefers to keep a very low profile, will use his keynote address to urge speedy government action on over 3,000 murders during the Northern Ireland troubles since 1969.

Britain's most senior policeman, Sir Ian Blair, commissioner at the Metropolitan Police Service, will join colleagues from across Ireland and the US for the three-day Policing the Future debate.

Northern Ireland Secretary Peter Hain, Security Minister Paul Goggins and PSNI chief constable Sir Hugh Orde will address over 300 delegates at the Waterfront Hall.

According to an advance copy of Sir Desmond's speech, he is expected to say: "Secretary of State, you are aware that I have previously called on government to grasp and deal with the issue of dealing with the past by establishing a broadly-based and inclusive commission to consult widely and to recommend how we as a society should deal with our past in such a way that it will enable us to embrace fully the future.

"This issue must be given the priority it deserves."

Discussion in the past has centred upon a South-African-style truth commission allowing perpetrators to meet with their victims as well as addressing that legacy of violence and trauma.

Sir Des, who chairs the Northern Ireland Policing Board which scrutinises

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local police, is expected to welcome Sinn Fein`s recent commitment to support policing once devolved government is restored.

A Sinn Fein delegation including policing spokesmen Gerry Kelly and Raymond McCartney is expected to attend.

The Board chairman is likely to pay tribute to the courage of those who braved paramilitary intimidation to sit on local policing scrutiny bodies.

Speaking in advance, PSNI chief constable Sir Hugh said: "I want this conference to contribute to a global vision of policing. As we move towards employing, in partnership, a seamless approach to tackling such issues as organised crime and terrorism, I see Policing the Future as providing a valuable forum for discussion and debate on policing methods in the decades to come."

Al Hutchinson, police oversight commissioner who monitors changes to the Police Service of Northern Ireland, will be there along with police ombudsman, Nuala O`Loan, who investigates complaints against the PSNI.

Kathy O`Toole, the first chief inspector of the Irish police force, will also be on a discussion panel.

Charles Ramsey, former chief of Washington Metropolitan Police, and John Timoney, police chief at the City of Miami Police, are attending.

Nationalist SDLP justice spokesman Alban Maginnis welcomed Sir Desmond`s intervention in the truth recovery debate.

"There has to be a systematic recovery of truth, not the rather disparate truth recovery elements that we have at the moment," he said.

"There should be a victims` forum convened which would look at the issue, study possible mechanisms and come up with a future set of proposals in relation to truth recovery."

Ian Paisley Jnr, of the Democratic Unionist Party, said the authorities were already spending too much on policing the past.

"Despite all that money, we are no nearer convictions of people who are guilty," he said.

"We have a lawyers` banquet created but we don`t actually have justice for the victims and we don`t have due process."

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**STARRING:** Peter O'Toole, Jodie Whittaker, Richard Griffiths, Leslie Phillips.

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**RATING:** ★★★★★

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