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THURSDAY
21/06/2007
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SF urged to increase efforts to recover the Disappeared

The bodies of IRA murder victims who were abducted and secretly buried could yet be located if Sinn Fein leaders became more involved in the hunt, it was claimed today.

As the US Consul General in Belfast, Dean Pittman, held a reception for families of the so-called Disappeared, a relative of one of those killed urged Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness to intensify their efforts to find answers.

Oliver McVeigh, whose brother Columba, 17, was taken from his hometown village of Donaghmore, Co Tyrone in 1975, praised the American assistance.

But he said: "I still think doors can be opened closer to home."

"Martin McGuinness and Gerry Adams could take a more hands-on approach, go to the people who were involved, ask for information and don't leave without answers."

Even though the IRA pledged to help locate the bodies of nine people listed among the Disappeared, only four were ever located.

As around 30 relatives gathered at Mr Pittman's south Belfast residence

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today, doves were released in a symbolic gesture by the families.

A new freephone number in the US was also launched in an effort to get anyone with information on the missing bodies to come forward.

The event was part of a Day of Private Reflection initiative by the Healing through Remembering project to acknowledge the hurt caused by the conflict in Northern Ireland.

Mr Pittman said: "While Northern Ireland has turned a welcome page in its political history, there is still an obvious need to deal with the legacies of the past.

"This Day of Reflection is just one way we can remember and acknowledge the deep pain that many people still deal with, not least those who have endured the disappearance of their loved ones."

The event followed the death last month of Columba McVeigh`s mother Vera, 82, who campaigned tirelessly for the return of his body.

And her other son, who pledged to take up his mother`s work, focused his attention firmly on Mr Adams, the Sinn Fein President, and Mr McGuinness, now Deputy First Minister in Northern Ireland`s power-sharing administration.

Both men have urged anyone who can help end the anguish to do so.

Mr McGuinness even declared the McVeigh family had suffered a grave injustice.

But Oliver McVeigh claimed: "I`m of the opinion that if those two gentlemen put the same effort into resolving the issue of the Disappeared as they did in getting the political institutions up and running, getting the Deputy First Minister`s job and the big salaries at Stormont there would be more resolved than this.

"I think they are just pacifying us by saying we are doing this and that.

"We need to move this up a notch and say that`s not good enough because people are still not coming forward.

"My mother died a month ago and I made her a promise I would keep this going and I will do that even more vigorously.

"Dying wasn`t a problem for her, apart from she didn`t want to die before she got her son`s body. That`s been bugging me every day.

"Families can get over the terrible thing of their loved ones being murdered, executed and put in a shallow grave. What they can`t get over is not getting them back to give them a Christian burial."

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FILM: SHREK THE THIRD

DIRECTORS: Chris Miller, Raman Hui.

VOICES OF: Mike Myers, Eddie Murphy, Cameron Diaz, Justin Timberlake.

DETAILS: US / 92mins (G)

RATING: ★★☆☆☆

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