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Finucane family may challenge decision

By Staff Reporter

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THE decision to withhold a police report on security force collusion in Northern Ireland paramilitary murders could be challenged in court, it was claimed yesterday.

A coroner investigating the controversial killing of Catholic solicitor Pat Finucane (38) by loyalists in 1989 has been given access to the dossier while his family has been left partly in the dark.

Former Metropolitan Police commissioner Sir John Stevens has completed the report on the shooting of Mr

Finucane who died in front of his three children in his north Belfast home.

Former Committee for the Administration of Justice director Maggie Beirne said: "There are bound to be legal challenges to the fact that the coroner has seen this material, which is considered very relevant to the inquest, but the legal teams for the families will not be able to have access to the same material.

"It is probably too early to say but all the signs are there that this is not going to be the easy answer either."

Sir John investigated allegations that elements within military intelligence and the RUC's Special Branch were colluding with loyalist assassination squads.

Mr Finucane was killed by UDA gunman Ken Barrett.

The Stevens Report said his murder and that of Protestant student Adam Lambert (19) in 1987 in west Belfast could have been prevented.

Mr Finucane first came to public prominence because of he regularly represented paramilitary suspects.

The Stevens Report considered comments by former government minister Douglas Hogg, who said a month before Mr Finucane's killing that some solicitors were "unduly sympathetic" to the IRA.

The inquiry found that to the extent that Mr Hogg's comments were based on information passed on by police, they were not justifiable and the minister was 'compromised'.

Ms Beirne, who headed state abuse lobby group the CAJ between 2004 and earlier this year, was giving evidence earlier this month to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee of MPs.

She said question marks surrounded how much of the material unearthed by Sir John would be drawn on by coroner John Leckey.

A total of 48 contentious inquests have still to be heard.

"As a society, what we have to do is to recognise that people do need answers and that that is an important part of us moving forward," Ms Beirne said.

"If the coroner is now able to start the inquests it will deal with some of the issues that families have but inquests in Northern Ireland still have more limited powers than ones in England and Wales.

"Whether he will be able to answer all the questions, we still have to wait and see."

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