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Anniversary clash criticised

([Irish News](#))

A sister of one of eight IRA men shot dead by the SAS in Co Armagh has hit out at the timing of Sinn Féin's entrance into devolved government.

With republicans set to begin power sharing with unionists on May 8, the party was accused of ignoring relatives of those killed in an ambush on the same date 20 years ago.

A sister of Patrick Kelly, who led the IRA unit killed in a hail of bullets at Loughgall in the organisation's heaviest single loss, claimed no-one from Sinn Féin had spoken to her about joining the Stormont administration on May 8.

"If they have forgotten, it's a bloody disgrace," Roisin Kelly said.

"And if they remembered, is it Sinn Féin drawing a line under the past?"

"Are they saying: 'We're in a whole new phase. Let's forget about the past and move on?'"

Sinn Féin rejected Ms Kelly's claims and emphasised a series of events taking place to mark the 20th anniversary.

These include a tour of all the graves – which relatives and party representatives will attend – and the unveiling of a large monument to those killed.

A commemoration march from Galbally in Co Tyrone to Cappagh village will be held this weekend.

"Members of the families have been kept fully up to date including Patrick Kelly's sons and daughters," a Sinn Féin representative said.

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Francie Molloy, chairman of the party's national commemoration committee, said Sinn Féin had wanted devolution restored immediately after the March elections but had to wait for Ian Paisley's DUP to be ready.

He said it was only because the day before was a bank holiday that the return to Stormont clashed with the Loughgall anniversary.

"There was no intent to try to wipe out or forget the past," he said.

"Getting the executive up and running and the democratic process in place doesn't change our aspirations for a united Ireland.

"It's trying to bring reunification closer, which would have been the aspiration of the men killed at Loughgall."

A website dedicated to the occasion has been set up by the Loughgall Commemoration Committee.

"Whilst the families are not directly involved they are all aware of our events and are participating in most of them," Ruairi Gildernew of the committee said.

But Ms Kelly disputed the level of contact.

"When I found out about the website they said they would keep us informed but they haven't," she said.

Ms Kelly, a personal development trainer and a lifelong republican, said she was not opposed to Sinn Féin's decision to form a government with the DUP and join the Policing Board.

She said this could have happened years earlier had the circumstances been right.

Her brother Patrick was part of an IRA team gunned down as they launched a bomb attack on Loughgall RUC station on May 8 1987.

SAS troops lying in wait fired more than 600 bullets at the eight-man unit and also killed a

civilian caught in the crossfire.

Relatives have accused the British forces of operating a shoot-to-kill policy.

In 2001 the European Court of Human Rights determined that the paramilitaries' human rights had been violated by the failure to carry out a proper investigation into the deaths.

Ms Kelly, who has met British officials and Chief Constable Sir Hugh Orde as part of her campaign, said the deaths of her brother and others during the Troubles had helped bring the peace process to where it is now.

"I just wish people would talk to me about it," she said.

"You want reassured that he didn't die without a reason.

"On May 8 [Sinn Féin] are going into government.

"I believe if somebody from Sinn Féin had sat down with me and said: 'We recognise it's a big day but this is the reason why' then I don't think I would be as disappointed and let down.

"I know there are an awful lot of anniversaries but for a big one like that surely somebody would have thought: 'We need to be a bit sensitive here'."

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