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Friday, March 6, 2009

## IRA urged to co-operate with legacy body

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DEAGLÁN de BRÉADÚN, Political Correspondent

PROMINENT ADVOCATE of Northern Ireland reconciliation Denis Bradley has appealed to the IRA to co-operate with the Legacy Commission which was proposed in a report on the Troubles issued by the Consultative Group on the Past which he chaired with Lord Eames.

The commission would spend five years promoting peace and stability in Northern Ireland, with a budget of £100 million (€13 million). A separate proposal for a £12,000 recognition payment to relatives of victims has been ruled out at this time by the British government.

Addressing the Committee on Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, at Leinster House yesterday, Mr Bradley said: "The only door that has been closed to us is the door of the IRA and that disappoints me greatly."

In response to the republican argument that the consultative group had been established by the British government but that the United Nations should set up an inquiry instead, Mr Bradley said: "There is no history of the UN to carry out such an exercise anywhere in the world."

He had argued with senior Sinn Féin people that they needed to stop this argument because it was not fair to the surviving victims and relatives to raise expectations in this regard.

Since the IRA had not engaged so far, there was a growing perception among some relatives in Northern Ireland that they will never engage, he said. "It is going to be a disgrace if the IRA stand offside."

He appealed to the IRA to co-operate with the commission. He knew how difficult it was and that many ex-IRA activists "just want to get on with their lives and that is understandable". He added: "The Irish Government contribution in future is vital because this is a British-Irish dispute, at heart a dispute that has lasted 400 years."

Sinn Féin MP and MLA Pat Doherty praised the commitment of the consultative group and its engagement with victims of the Troubles. "But there is an absolutely

fundamental fault line," he said. "It is very deep, wide and ugly." The British government had established the group, funded it, set the remit and would have the final call on implementing its recommendations.

He continued: "In plain language, the British government authorised the murder of its own citizens and will do anything and everything to block that coming out."

He had no doubt about the integrity of the group: "But be very, very careful you don't end up being used by the British government who will do anything to block the exposure of what they were involved in, in the conflict."

Lord Eames said the consultative group was appointed on June 22nd, 2007. Between that time and publication of its report on January 28th this year, they had conducted an extensive debate and listening exercise with Northern Ireland society.

Describing the emotional nature of the experience, he said: "We felt we knew, had seen and experienced it all but nothing prepared us for what lay ahead."

The group was "overwhelmed" by the numbers who wanted to make contact with it – victims and victims' groups, political parties, churches and other organisations, government and security personnel, academics and retired individuals. "If you look at the recommendations, none of those are plucked out of the air," he added.

This article appears in the print edition of the Irish Times

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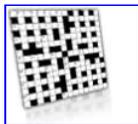
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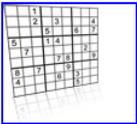


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