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Last Updated: Monday, February 2, 2009, 20:27

MLAs urged not to scupper Troubles plan

Politicians were today warned against rejecting the entire Eames-Bradley report on dealing with the legacy of the Troubles, despite controversial plans to give £12,000 to all victims.

The report by the Consultative Group on the Past was debated at Stormont where there was cross-party concern over the proposal to give the relatives of every victim, including dead paramilitaries, a payment recognising their pain.

Unionist parties condemned the recommendation and while others echoed the concerns, there were appeals for the wider report to be considered, including plans for a Legacy Commission to examine murders from the Troubles.

The Assembly debated a motion tabled by the DUP which raised the needs of victims but condemned the payment plan claiming it equated perpetrators of violence with innocent victims.

The DUP's David Simpson said the proposed payment made no distinction between the relatives of paramilitaries and those whose loved ones were the victims of paramilitary attacks.

He cited the cases of IRA members buried with paramilitary trappings. "In those cases families gave their public approval and support to their (relatives') terrorist activities and I do not believe these cases should be treated the same as the cases of innocent men, women and children who were slaughtered," he said.

DUP colleagues criticised a proposal removing employment barriers for ex-prisoners and claimed the report introduced an effective amnesty for crimes from the Troubles after the five-year Legacy Commission ended.

SDLP leader Mark Durkan said he had concerns over aspects of the report, but argued action must be taken to deal with the legacy of violence. "We don't want a treatment of the past that blurs responsibility for the violence and for so much suffering," he said.

Accepting the concerns over the payments plan, he said: "The wider proposals in this group's report in terms of a legacy commission dealing with the past should not be lost sight of."

Alliance leader David Ford said he shared many of the criticisms of the report, but he said the past had to be dealt with. "To leave things for another generation, bringing-up a generation in a society that is divided, is to say that we run the risk of repetition of the cycle of the last 40 years," he said.

Sinn Féin's Raymond McCartney called for the proposals to be given careful consideration, but he expressed concern the British government had commissioned the report

despite State forces being a party to the conflict.

Ulster Unionist Alan McFarland said he had concerns over some elements of the report which he said caused further pain to victims and he questioned plans to have a Legacy Commission examine the violence of the past.

Leader of the Progressive Unionist Party Dawn Purvis urged a careful reflection on all the Eames-Bradley recommendations.

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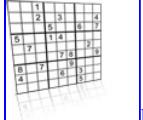
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