

From: John Park

Copy: Mr P Martin

Date: 26 November 1999

To: Dr K McCoy

**SDLP Paper *Victims we will remember them*, presented to their 29<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference  
5-7 November 1999**

I thought you might be interested to see the attached paper, which draws (with full acknowledgement) on our *Living with the Trauma of the Troubles* report. I do not know who wrote the paper but I received this copy from the Victims Liaison Unit.

John Park

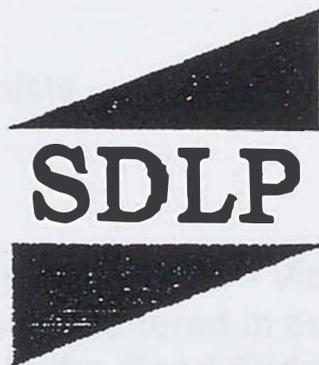
# VICTIMS

*we will remember them*

## 1. Introduction

1.1 In creating the lasting framework and ordering the new dawn in politics on this island of which Joan Clarke spoke in April 1948, we must ensure that the new society has the confidence of all sections of that society. The Good Friday Agreement contained three strands dedicated to the potential new relationships between

- Northern and Southern
- North and South
- Ireland and Britain.



1.2 We must also consider the victims and families - and the state to be played by those who are in our books of state. Victims were

1.3

# VICTIMS

*we will remember them*

## 2. Definition

2.1

Paper submitted to 29<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference

5<sup>th</sup> - 7<sup>th</sup> November 1999

Motion No 59 refers

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# VICTIMS

*we will remember them*

## 1 Introduction

1.1 In creating the lasting settlement and creating the new dawn in politics on this island of which John Hume spoke in April 1998, we must ensure that the new society has the confidence of all sections of that society. The Good Friday Agreement contained three strands dedicated to the potential new relationships between:

- Nationalists and Unionists
- North and South
- Ireland and Britain

1.2 We must also consider a fourth strand - Victims and Society - and the role to be played by those who have suffered in our times of trouble. Victims were mentioned only fleetingly in the Good Friday Agreement. It is only with their forgiveness or, at the very least, their acceptance and their involvement in society, that we are able to look to a future that is brighter than our past. We must remember them and, in the words of Sir Kenneth Bloomfield, the Victims Commissioner, *we will remember them*.

## 2 Definition

2.1 Before considering measures to address victims' issues, we need to be clear of our overall aims and, indeed, what we mean by "Victim". The Bloomfield Report takes victims to be the surviving injured and those who care for them, together with close relatives who mourn their dead. The Social Services Inspectorate Report: "Living with the Trauma of the Troubles" shies away from the term "victim" altogether, believing people are often more willing to accept the term "individual affected by the civil unrest". The latter report also adopts the principle of allowing this group to be self-defining.

2.2 In a true spirit of reconciliation and healing, the SDLP sees a victim as being any individual:

- whose life has altered its course as a result of the bitterness and division in our society and
- who believes that the alteration was negative.

- 2.3 This definition encompasses most people who have spent a significant length of time in the North, and includes some who have never even visited our shores. It even includes individuals who might be perceived by some to have brought suffering upon themselves. It is, though, a self-defining group, which is important. As the SSI Report states and as Bloomfield acknowledges in part, some individuals would be distressed to be classed as victims, even though wider society might perceive them to be such. Some victims have suffered more than others, but because suffering is such an intensely personal feeling, the level of suffering cannot be predicted by the type of experience. Support should be available to all traumatized individuals, according to their need, regardless of the scale of the incident in which they were involved.
- 2.4 This is a key point; all groups of victims should recognize that there is no monopoly on pain. Some victims have suffered bereavement or separation, some have suffered physical or psychological injury, some have been forced out of their homes and others have suffered material loss. Whatever the individual circumstances, victims probably stand to gain more by recognizing their common suffering than focusing on their individual differences.
- 2.5 The overarching goals of the policies contained in this paper are:
- For victims as a group to have their collective pain recognized by Society
  - For individual victims to have their individual pain recognized by Society
  - To provide a mechanism for offering physical and practical support to victims to enable them to adjust and reintegrate with Society as fully as possible
  - For victims to feel that their suffering, although tragic and unacceptable, was not in vain
  - For Society to affirm that it will not tolerate the same kind of suffering and pain, ever again.

Every step has been taken to avoid:

- extending, rather than reducing, the pain and suffering of victims
- enshrining a mechanism to turn pain and suffering into bitterness, resentment and blaming
- encouraging arguments about the right to qualify for victim status
- diminishing the right of victims to express themselves as they would wish on an individual basis
- allowing victims of non-sectarian crime to feel forgotten

### 3 Social and Psychological Needs of Victims

- 3.1 The Social Services Inspectorate, within the DHSS, prepared a report entitled "Living with the Trauma of the Troubles" in March 1998. The report focuses on examining and promoting the further development of services to meet the social and psychological needs of victims. It does not address the financial and political aspects of the Victims Issue, but does provide recommendations that make up a comprehensive package of social support. Although some of the recommendations are necessarily based upon the existing administrative arrangements which the SDLP does not support (i.e. Health and Social Services Trusts and Boards), they would translate well into any new structures that may emerge.
- 3.2 The recommendations in the Report are sensible and are attached at Appendix 1. They were developed by a multidisciplinary team of experts, victims' representatives and academics; the team was cross-community. The SDLP endorses these recommendations, and will work in the Executive, Assembly and any other possible forum to promote their implementation.

### 4 The Bloomfield Report

- 4.1 "We will remember them" (the Bloomfield Report) does not particularly address the social needs of victims; its main focus is on financial and political needs. The recommendations seem broadly sensible, in as far as they go. They appear, however, to apply to only a proportion of victims. Moreover, they do not appear to consider public recognition of the individuals and their own personal tragedies. Nor, to any great extent, is there any attempt to place the victims plight in the context of healing Society's wounds.
- 4.2 One additional proposal that might go some way to addressing the issues missed by Bloomfield could be the compilation of a register of victims. Any individual who saw fit would be able to submit their name for inclusion on a register to be housed in the Assembly Speaker's Office. On taking office, any future First and Deputy First Minister would be invited to endorse the register - effectively, therefore, recognizing all individual victims and remembering why they will preside over a Government of shared power.
- 4.3 Bloomfield rejected the proposal for a public memorial-listing victims in case it provoked resentment with some victims not wishing to be listed alongside other victims. He also had concerns that it might become a target for vandalism. Because a victims' register would not be accessible to the public, nobody entering their name to it would have sight of other names on it. Moreover, because the register would not be on public display, it could not be the target of vandalism.

4.4 To balance the Victims register, a Register of Reconciliation could also be established. This type of Register already operates in South Africa, and provides a mechanism for those who have done (non-criminal) wrong and those who have turned a blind eye to wrong to clear the air and seek reconciliation. The South African register is on public access and sample entries are reproduced at Appendix 2.

4.5 The SDLP will press for these two registers to be established.

## 5 Victims' Advocate

5.1 Bloomfield's recommendations include the need for talk in terms of a victims' champion or Ombudsman for Victims. The SDLP will press for the appointment of a junior minister within the First and Deputy First Ministers' Office with responsibility, *inter alia*, for victims. This will demonstrate the commitment at the heart of the inclusive Executive to obtain a fair deal for victims and to recognize their pain.

5.2 In South Africa, the approximate equivalent to the Victims Commission is the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, headed by Archbishop Desmond Tutu. It is easy to overplay the parallels between South Africa and Northern Ireland and between the two commissions, but it is interesting to note that in South Africa, the "Victims' Champion" is a high profile, but politically neutral figure. The SDLP will press for the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to appoint a similar Victims Advocate. This would ensure that the Victims' Advocate had at least some element of cross-community support.

5.3 In addition to a Minister for Victims and a Victims Advocate, there should be a Commission consisting of independent community workers under the Chairmanship of the Victims Advocate. The Commission and the Victims' Advocate would be accessible to Victims and have a position of standing to raise victims' issues and concerns with the Government.

## 6 Platform for Victims of the Troubles - a Video Archive

6.1 It is important that victims be given a public platform to allow them to articulate their feelings and viewpoints, both in a collective sense and on an individual basis. The provision of such a forum would indicate that the "state" had recognized both the contribution made already by victims to the arrival of an agreement and also the vital role that they will have to play in turning that agreement into a lasting peace.

6.2 The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC contains an Oral History Archive. This houses more than 2,900 interviews with survivors, giving their own, personal testimonies. Some of the interviews are video based and some are audio only, and in some cases, form the basis of exhibits in the museum. The majority of the tapes were compiled by Holocaust Centres around the world and were donated to the museum.

- 6.3 The SDLP believes that the "beautiful building" proposed in the Bloomfield Report should house a similar library of video or audio testimonies. Victims' Groups could be involved in the compilation of the tapes, whilst a mechanism should exist within the building for victims who prefer to record their testimonies independently. The Victims' Advocate (see paragraph 5.3) would have to give careful consideration to the level of public access to be given to the testimonies; it may be that some victims would not wish their testimonies to be publicly available during their lifetime. The SDLP will work within the Assembly to make the Video Archive a central feature of the support measures for Victims.

## **7 Core funding of victims' organisations**

- 7.1 An annual fund as described under the "Reconciliation and Victims of Violence" section of the Good Friday Agreement should be set aside by the Government to allow Victims' Organizations to apply for core funding or funding for specific projects. The fund should run initially for 5 years, with an evaluation carried out after 3 years. This would enable the organizations to devote their time to working on healing division and hurt, rather than spending their time seeking funds.
- 7.2 The fund should be administered by the Victims Commission and must have clearly transparent criteria for appropriate and inappropriate use of funds. Clearly, the use of funding for party political purposes or for overtly sectarian purposes would be unacceptable. Such criteria would enable the wider public to have the confidence that the funds were being used for laudable purposes, and would enable organizations to be able to gauge their likelihood of success in obtaining funds prior to their application.

## **8 Monetary compensation for victims**

- 8.1 Suggestions have been made that special compensation arrangements be made for victims of the troubles. Interestingly, in South Africa, they refer to "reconciliation payments", rather than "compensation payments" in an acknowledgment that you cannot compensate someone, either in full or in part, for the loss of a relative or for physical or mental injury.
- 8.2 The present Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme compares favourably with schemes in operation elsewhere. Nevertheless, there is still scope for its improvement. To this end, the SDLP notes the wide ranging review of Criminal Injuries Compensation in Northern Ireland (Report to the Secretary of State by Sir Kenneth Bloomfield, June 1999) and welcomes some of its recommendations. The Party will address this report in due course in a separate paper.

## 9 Official Day of Reconciliation

- 9.1 The SDLP would like to see the establishment of a official Day of Reconciliation to act as a lasting reminder to all people of the distance that we have travelled over the last three decades and of the distance that still has to be travelled. It is too early at present to establish such a day, but the SDLP reaffirms its commitment to work for peace and reconciliation to make a Day of Reconciliation a reality.

## 10 Conclusion

- 10.1 This package of proposals is commended to Conference as a comprehensive package of action aimed at bringing victims in from the cold. As a whole, our society has done too little for victims to date. This might provide an excuse for remaining silent on the issue - but to do so would be the coward's option. Instead, let the SDLP stand up and be counted; as a party of social democracy, we have always championed the cause of the underdog and provided a voice for everyday people. Our message to victims of all sides is simple:

We won't let you down

## 11 Credits

- 11.1 The SDLP gratefully acknowledges that the ideas contained in this paper build upon the foundations laid by other reports and studies, including the Good Friday Agreement, the Victims Commissioner's Report, and the Social Services Inspectorate Report. Above all, though, the ideas have evolved from original concepts put forward by Victims' Groups in Northern Ireland and other countries affected by violence.

**Justice and Equality Policy Sub-Group  
September 1999**