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Last Updated: Monday, November 3, 2008, 19:21

NI rift deepens as Adams accused over 'Disappeared'

The rift at the heart of Northern Ireland's government appeared to deepen today when the DUP accused Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams of withholding information on the whereabouts of the "Disappeared" victims of the Troubles.

While Mr Adams has faced the allegation before, the sight of senior DUP members repeating it on the floor of the Assembly suggested a resolution to the long-running stand-off between the two main parties in the power-sharing administration was as far away as ever.

The cabinet has not met for more than four months amid deadlock over a series of outstanding issues, such as a timetable for the devolution of policing powers and legislative protection for Irish speakers.

During a debate on the continuing search for the bodies of people abducted and killed by republicans during the conflict, North Belfast MLA Nelson McCausland accused Mr Adams of being the Belfast Commander of the IRA in the 1970s and of setting up specialist units which killed and disposed of so-called informers.

While relatives of the Disappeared looked on from the public gallery, DUP chairman Lord Morrow later backed Mr McCausland's claims.

However, the Sinn Fein president strongly refuted the allegations before adding that the IRA continued to assist in the process of finding the remains.

The bodies of fifteen Catholics killed by republicans during the Troubles were buried in secret locations.

Following the setting up of a special commission to locate the remains in 1999, four bodies have been found.

Mr McCausland said Mr Adams had information about the Disappeared and called on him to tell the truth.

"Of course Gerry Adams has always sought to distance himself from the whole gruesome episode but the fact is we don't believe him," he said.

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"The violence is over and for that we are glad but is it not time for Adams to show some remorse for these crimes, is it not time that he showed some remorse for the evil inflicted on so many families by the organisation that he commanded?"

Mr Adams denied the claims laid against him.

"Before I speak to this motion, which I am supporting, I want to deny and refute the assertion made by Mr McCausland," he said.

"I want to commend and support all the families that have suffered a grievous injustice and who have campaigned with dignity for many years to locate the remains of their loved ones and I want to welcome them here today."

Speaker of the House William Hay said he had some concerns about the remarks made during the debate and would be seeking to review them.

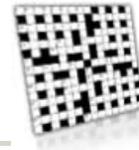
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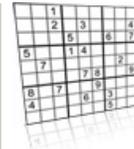
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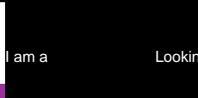
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