

Opening Statement by Mr Tim Dalton, Commissioner, Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains

Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement

18th Nov 2021

Thank you, Chairman, for inviting us to appear before this Committee. We very much appreciate the interest shown by your Committee in our work.

My name is Tim Dalton and I was appointed by the two Governments in 2018 as an ICLVR Commissioner.

I am accompanied at the meeting by fellow Commissioner Mrs Rosalie Flanagan who was appointed earlier this year.

We are joined also by Mr Geoff Knupfer, the Commission's lead Forensic Scientist and Investigator who was a member of the ICLVR team which met with this Committee in January 2018. Mr Knupfer has, as the need arises, worked with the Commission since 2005.

With your agreement, Chairman, both Mrs Flanagan and Mr Knupfer will shortly address you.

At the outset we would like to acknowledge the enormous contribution made to the work of the ICLVR by my predecessor, the late Frank Murray, and also by Mrs Flanagan's predecessor Sir Kenneth Bloomfield who has retired as Commissioner. Both men were members of the delegation which met with the Committee in 2018.

The Commission is one of the reconciliation outcomes of the Good Friday Agreement which provided that it was essential to acknowledge and address the suffering of the victims of violence as a necessary element of reconciliation. The Commission was established on the basis of an intergovernmental agreement between the Irish and British Governments signed in April 1999. That agreement was then implemented by means of legislation enacted in both jurisdictions.

One of the key features of our situation legally, Chairman, is that we are an independent and non-political body.

Our task, in a nutshell, is to locate and return to their families the remains of individuals killed and secretly buried by the IRA in the course of the Northern Troubles - that is between the early 1970's and the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. The victims are referred to colloquially as "The Disappeared." Our job, as I've mentioned, is to search, hopefully recover and return remains. It is not our role to comment on other aspects of policy or practice relating to the troubles.

Another key feature of our governing legislation is that it legally guarantees that any information given to us or to our agents in the course of our work must be treated as absolutely confidential and can be used solely for the purpose of locating remains. This is underpinned by provisions rendering information we receive inadmissible in evidence in criminal proceedings, by restrictions on disclosure of information and restrictions on the forensic testing of human and other items that may be found.

It is important that persons who may have relevant information but may be reluctant to share it with us should know that confidentiality is assured and the confidentiality rule has always been strictly

observed.

Finally, Chairman, we are happy to report the continuing support and cooperation of both Governments, police services on both sides, the contribution of Department of Justice and NIO personnel, the contribution of various experts and contractors we have engaged as needed and the cooperation of people within the republican community who have guided us towards relevant information sources. Mr Knupfer will speak about the cases that have been successfully concluded and those that have not yet been finalised.

The story of the “Disappeared”, Chairman, is one of the greatest tragedies of the troubles and we are honoured to have the opportunity of attempting to ease the pain it brought by attempting to recover remains in the cases still outstanding and returning them to their families.

Once again we are appealing for information that might help us complete our task - however insignificant that information may appear to be - and our earnest request is that this distinguished Committee would lend its support to that appeal.

I will now ask Commissioner Flanagan to address you.