

PRESENTATION TO THE GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT IMPLEMENTATION COMMITTEE

You have kindly invited us here today to discuss our work with you. I will make a brief opening statement to set a context around our discussion. The main focus of work for JFF at present is Operation Denton, the review by Mr. Jon Boutcher, the former Chief Constable of Bedfordshire, England, into the Glenanne series of murders. Regarding those we represent, these include the Dublin/Monaghan bombings (1974) Dundalk bombing (1975) and Castleblayney bombing (1976) and the murder of John Francis Green (1975) which all occurred in this jurisdiction and the Miami Showband murders in Northern Ireland (1975).

Not all of the cases whose families we support come under the Operation Denton umbrella so they are, unfortunately, left in a bit of a limbo situation. With regard to Dublin/Monaghan, we are still pursuing a civil case in the High Court, Belfast. Other cases are awaiting a decision on the admissibility issue in this case. The Glenanne series of cases are also being investigated by the Police Ombudsman for NI.

Mr. Boutcher and his team have now been in contact with the vast majority our family members and survivors and have taken detailed statements from them of the impact on their lives of the loss of their loved ones and the lasting effect of the injuries sustained by the survivors.

While Covid has impacted considerably on the work of Operation Denton, nevertheless, good progress is being made and they have received and are continuing to receive good co-operation from the PSNI and the relevant entities in Britain. Unfortunately, though, there has been a problem in gaining access to the Garda files. Mr. Boutcher was advised that the Garda Commissioner had received legal advice that the material could not be handed over because Operation Denton was essentially a review and not an investigation.

We had a meeting with senior officials from the Dept. of Justice and the Dept. of Foreign Affairs this week and, following that meeting, we are hopeful that the problem can be resolved. The Dept. of Justice is seeking legal advice on the issue from the Attorney General. If the advice from the Attorney General is that the files cannot be made available under current legislation, then the Department has committed to having the necessary new legislation passed by the Oireachtas and they have agreed to seek priority for such legislation to be enacted.

Mr Boucher has been liaising with the Garda Commissioner on this issue since last April and we believe it should have been resolved months ago. We have impressed upon the officials with whom we met of the urgency of this matter. All of the lives lost were lost almost half a century ago and family members are dying every year. It is ironic, now that the families have the best chance they ever had, of learning the truth as to why their loved ones were mown down in no-warning bombs, that the delay in providing information is coming from so close to home.