

WAVE Trauma Centre

Opening remarks to the Joint Committee on the Good Friday Agreement December 9th, 2021

Can I first begin by thanking the Chair Fergus O'Dowd and members of the Joint Committee on the Good Friday Implementation Group for welcoming us to the session today. We appreciate the many challenges regarding Covid and whilst we would have preferred to see you all in person, we all know of the importance of remaining safe. Thank you for agreeing to have this online session with us today.

WAVE has been in existence for 30 years. I have worked in the organisation for the last 26 years. During this time, I have been privileged to have worked with the families of those disappeared as a result of the Troubles. The experience of having a loved one disappeared has been harrowing for the families. They have faced many challenges and above all their wish is to see their loved ones brought home for a Christian burial. I am delighted today to be accompanied by several of the families.

- Maria Lynskey whose uncle Joe Lynskey was disappeared in August 1972; his body has not been recovered.
- Dympna Kerr and Oliver McVeigh are joining us too. Their brother was Columba McVeigh. Columba was abducted from Dublin in October 1975. It is believed he was brought to Braggan bog County Monaghan and despite searches there by ICLVR he sadly has not as yet been recovered.
- And finally, we are also joined by Anne Morgan the sister of Seamus Ruddy. Seamus was disappeared in France in 1985. His body was recovered in May 2017 following a number of searches.

One of the most powerful aspects of the work with the families of the disappeared is the solidarity of the families in supporting each other even when their own loved ones have been found. I am going to hand over to the families shortly.

However, before I do I want to make some general comments on the current situation for many individuals bereaved and / or injured as a result of the Troubles.

One of the most challenging issues currently for those bereaved during the Troubles is the question of legacy and the direction of travel of the British

Government. This has retraumatized, it has brought heartache to families and has raised issues around worth - why is my loved one's death not been addressed, why is the State saying that their death no longer matters and why are they telling those who perpetrated my loss that they are no longer of interest to the State?

Over my time in WAVE, I have engaged with families whose loved one's deaths were being investigated by the RUC, PSNI, HET, Garda Siochana, Police Ombudsman, the legacy unit in PSNI and specialist investigative teams such as Operation Kenova. From the Good Friday Agreement, the bereaved have been asked to make concessions -

- Early release of prisoners
- Limit to a two-year prison sentence
- An ad hoc process to deal with the legacy of the past. At times it is clear that the priorities adopted in legacy have been politically driven
- And now once again there is a proposal that they will have to make concessions again.

The effect on those bereaved has been colossal. Many have spoken about feeling that they have been rewounded. That their loved ones have died all over again. The expected direction of travel is morally and ethically wrong.

Legacy can be addressed. We have seen that in our work with families engaging through Operation Kenova led by Jon Boutcher. The SoS keeps stating there is no alternative to the statute of limitations. This is simply untrue. This is an alternative - but the Tory Government need to find a process that provides an amnesty and protections for a number of soldiers.

We need the international community to stand with us on this. The US administration were firm supporters of the Peace Process. The Irish Government also need to hold firm - and as a Government I would urge you to fully address the deaths that happened in your jurisdiction. It would be beneficial if a legacy process operated across Ireland given the cross jurisdictional issues that arise

The second point I want to raise is support for those injured. The injured pension has become available to those who were injured in the Troubles who live within the United Kingdom. Those who were injured in the south of Ireland and who are not UK citizens are not eligible to apply. We urge the Irish Government to address this issues and ensure parity.

Finally, to return to the issue of the disappeared and why we are here today. Disappearing individuals is one of the cruelest acts anyone can commit on families. It's the families who continue to suffer day and daily yearning and longing for their loved one's body to be located.

ICLVR came before the Committee a month ago - they do sterling work - however they rely on information. We urge those who hold that information regarding the whereabouts of any of the disappeared to provide it to ICLVR, through the channels available or to go to someone they trust in order that the information can be passed on.

ICLVR and the parameters around it work. It is one of the successes of processes set up under the Good Friday Agreement. However, it is an information led process and that's what is required. They have the specialists, they have the equipment, they have the funding. They need information.

The families of Joe Lynskey, Columba McVeigh, Robert Nairac and Lisa Dorrian need to be able to bury their loved ones and lay them to rest.

Thank you for inviting us to join you today.

I am now going to hand over to Maria Lynskey