

Statement on behalf of the Truth and Justice Movement.

Our cross community victims group has achieved political unity among all the major political parties in Northern Ireland(except the TUV) and the Republic of Ireland who have all signed our document pledging support and rejecting the Amnesty proposals of the British government. On top of that at a meeting in Westminster attended by every major party from the House of Commons and House of Lords except the Conservatives, we were able again to have unity in that every party supported us and signed our document rejecting the amnesty proposals. History was made in Belfast City Hall last August with all the major political parties from both sides of the border signing our document, which is the only document in the history of the island of Ireland signed by all the major parties. Our small group of cross community victims have been able to get all those political parties agree on one major issue, Rejecting the Amnesty proposals of the British government. We held a cross community victims event in Queens University Belfast in November 2021 which was also supported by NIPSA who are officially supporting us, and Father Sean McManus of the INC. Washington. The president of NIPSA Brian Smyth spoke at the event as did Father Sean by zoom. Senator Mark Daly was also a guest speaker.

We are totally non sectarian and non political engaging in victims issues and promoting victims led events. Successful meetings with the Taoiseach and the Foreign Affairs Minister Simon Coveney have recently taken place. We also ask your committee to hear our concerns on the GFA which has not worked for victims. We do not oppose the GFA and do not support calls for it to be scrapped. However facts show we have been left behind. Truth and justice for victims doesn't seem to be part of the GFA. Prisoners who committed thousands of murders and other serious crimes released to appease the paramilitaries and political parties without consideration of the victims and their families. We were not first or second on the list of bringing peace, we were and still are last. Broken promises mean broken hearts. Funding and cross community and cross border initiatives need to be looked at urgently. Within the unionist community the idea of buying paramilitaries off was a failure from the start as they are still here. Money going into the communities should be made public and accountable, it is being abused with providers turning a blind eye. Most victims do not belong to any victims group yet we have certain victims groups spokespersons claiming to represent victims and their own narrative of victims. Integration like power sharing should be a priority to help destroy sectarianism and sectarian politics. There has been a lack of political leadership in Northern Ireland in regards to the GFA. Amnesty proposals were not part of the GFA despite secret amnesties being handed out. Power sharing is abused with the petition of concern . The political parties in N.I have made the GFA about themselves instead of the victims and all political opinions. Like spoilt kids if they dont get their own way. If victims groups and individuals have the same narrative as a political party they are supported if not they are shunned or no true support given. The protocol and the GFA like victims issues have developed into orange and green speeches and opinions, instead of dialogue, equality and truth, not rants spewed at rallies to gain votes and un democratic change with instability. No one wants to go back to the days of the troubles. A suggestion would be to have a victims led, victims centred process on victims issues and have no links to paramilitaries or political parties. Political parties should not dictate victims issues instead they should take their lead from victims. As we have a form of on/off power sharing in Northern Ireland then surely both communities should also be represented in the Irish Senate. No one except the guilty should be frightened of the truth, be it on truth and justice issues, cross community initiatives, or politics.

On behalf of the Truth and Justice Movement I thank all of you for the invitation today.