

DÁIL ÉIREANN

AN COMHCHOISTE UM

FEIDHMIÚ CHOMHAONTÚ AOINE AN CHÉASTA

JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT

Déardaoin, 12 Nollaig 2013

Thursday, 12 December 2013

The Joint Committee met at 10.30 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Deputy Seán Crowe,	Senator Jim D'Arcy,
Deputy Frank Feighan,	Senator Mary Moran.
Deputy Martin Ferris,	
Deputy Michael P. Kitt,	
Deputy Joe O'Reilly,	
Deputy Brendan Smith,	
Deputy Jack Wall,	

In attendance: Senator Michael Mullins, Mr. Conor Murphy, MP, and Dr. Alasdair McDonnell, MP.

DEPUTY JOE MCHUGH IN THE CHAIR.

The joint committee met in private session until 10.55 a.m.

Effects of Violence: Discussion with Families of the Disappeared, WAVE Trauma Centre and Peace Factory

Chairman: I am pleased to welcome from the WAVE Trauma Centre, Ms Sandra Peake, Ms Mary McCallan and Mr. Dennis Godfrey; from the Families of the Disappeared, Ms Anne Morgan and Mr. Sean Megraw; and from the Peace Factory, Ms Denise Mullen Fox, Mr. Peter Devlin and Mr. Eugene Reavey.

The committee is looking forward to the groups' contributions. We are aware that we are working within a timeframe regarding the Richard Haass talks. A delegation from the committee met with him last month. Hopefully, this session today will be helpful to his deliberations.

I advise witnesses that they are protected by absolute privilege in respect of utterances at this committee. However, if they are directed by it to cease making remarks on a particular matter and continue to do so, they are entitled thereafter only to qualified privilege in respect of their remarks. They are directed that only cogent evidence on the subject matter of this meeting is to be given and are asked to respect the parliamentary practice to the effect that, where possible, they should not criticise or make charges against a Member of either House of the Oireachtas, a person outside the Houses nor an official by name or in such a way as to make him or her identifiable.

I call on Ms Sandra Peake to make her opening statement.

Ms Sandra Peake: I thank the Chair and the members of the committee for the opportunity to make a presentation on the WAVE Trauma Centre today.

The centre was established in 1991, which was late when one considers the levels of violence inflicted throughout the preceding years. It was created in response to ongoing deaths in north Belfast. From a nucleus of eight women, all of whom had lost partners, Widows Against Violence Empowered was formed with a constitution to only work with innocent victims bereaved through sectarian violence. In 1993, a woman whose husband was murdered by a paramilitary organisation for alleged informing was struggling with this information and the impact of the death on her young children. The women in WAVE identified it was wrong to view her as to be guilty by association. She and her children were grieving and it was felt we needed to widen our constitution to include everyone bereaved, regardless of religion, political opinion, cultural views or circumstances.

Later, WAVE's remit was widened to include those injured or traumatised as a result of the Troubles. This was an important development because while an official list exists of those who died, there is no list of those severely injured. The needs of the injured in many government reports have often been overlooked. We now see many injured people coming forward for the first time seeking help. Today, WAVE is an organisation which works in five dedicated outreach centres in Belfast, Armagh, Omagh, Ballymoney and Derry-Londonderry. We have 12 satellite projects, as well as providing services in other areas as required like in Dublin and London if families in these cities approach us for local-based services. Every year we serve on average 2,100 people who access support services. Last year we received over 550 new referrals which

is on par for the past five years. The cases or individuals who have approached us have been affected by incidents spanning the period from 1969 onwards and cover bereavement, injury and trauma. Many of the people had never tapped into support services before. WAVE's remit is wide because it responds to the needs of adults, young people and children.

Trauma education programmes are another important aspect of WAVE's work. We found that there was a lack of specific trauma education programmes and responded by developing a three-strand approach. We provide introductory accredited programmes that are delivered across the community. We provide a BSc. honours course in psychological trauma that is run in conjunction with Queen's University, the only such course available in Ireland. We also provide a professional development programme in order that all nurses and social workers, and from next year it will be open to all teachers, have received specific training in regard to victims and survivors and can lead in training, citizenship and how services can better respond to the needs that are presented. That is an important development. The programme is assisted and was initiated with EU funding.

WAVE's core principles are as follows: the empowerment of people who have been bereaved, injured or traumatised which is evident in our work; inclusivity by providing support in response to need; continuous improvement by the provision of high quality and innovative services; a commitment to both shaping and responding to changes; and accountability. More principles include equality and good relations and non-violence by ensuring that the violence should never happen again. It is important that people are continually reminded of same and the latter is demonstrated in the types of referrals and people who approach WAVE.

The Troubles had an unequal impact on society. In some areas the levels of death and injury were very high but other areas were relatively untouched. We disagree with the statement that everybody was touched by the Troubles. It is true that individuals were affected by road blocks and bomb scares. The real price of the Troubles is evident by the shattered lives that were created through death and injury.

WAVE sees four sections in today's society. They are as follows: the people who suffered a direct impact and bore the brunt of the violence; the people who were indirectly impacted; the people who dealt with the ramifications such as NGOs and lawyers; and the people who were not impacted, want to draw a line under costly inquiries and wish to relegate the impact of the Troubles to the past. It is the latter group who has little awareness of the impact that the Troubles had on people's lives. They are unaware that peace, within the limitations that we now enjoy, has come on the backs of those whose lives were irrevocably changed through bereavement or injury.

It is important to mention that our society is not devoid of the ongoing impact of paramilitaries because threats continue and there are instances of knee-capping and expulsion. We call for an urgent review of the mechanisms that deal with the issues. People have approached WAVE claiming that they have been threatened. Threat verification and assistance must be worked on and a very clear mechanism must be established, as a matter of urgency.

A culture of silence still exists. Recognition and acknowledgement is key to addressing the silence. In many ways recognition and acknowledgement have left the table. They should be returned and delivered in a number of ways and we have made such a case to Dr. R. Haass and Dr. M. O'Sullivan.

At present there is an emphasis on medicalising what happened. A new victims and survi-

vors service has been created but unfortunately it does not examine the wider issue. It seeks to medicalise and provide treatment and care, as opposed to examining the context in which incident happened and how people are presenting. Also, memorialisation and remembrance must be sensitively and carefully considered in terms of the impact of wider events that occurred over the past number of months.

WAVE believes that all individuals have a right to information. I shall hand over to my colleague, Ms McCallan, to make her presentation on that issue.

Ms Mary McCallan: I thank the committee for the opportunity to address it today. WAVE has worked for a number of years to support families and individuals who have sought to obtain information on the circumstances behind their bereavement or injury. A specific case work service was established in September 2012. However, truth, justice and acknowledgement remain contested matters in a society with varying expectations across the community and the client base we work with. It is clear from WAVE's work that families and individuals affected by the conflict deserve access to information on the circumstances in which people were bereaved or physically and psychologically injured. Acknowledgement of hurt is a vital part of recovery in their health and well-being. The withholding of information from the bereaved and injured people prolongs their suffering and prevents individual and societal healing.

WAVE is a cross-community and inclusive support organisation and is accustomed to dealing with individuals from a variety of backgrounds. It believes that all families have a right to know the circumstances of their bereavement or injury. The provision of advocacy and support to families engaging in these processes is vital. NGOs, such as WAVE, should not be hampered in carrying out such important work, whether through a lack of funding or a perceived unwillingness of others to provide information. Accessing information allows victims and survivors to become empowered, take ownership and resolve difficult and sensitive issues. Engaging with legacy issues contributes to building and cementing peace in areas affected by the conflict.

Over the past 15 years statements and promises have been made to victims. There was little in the various agreements to specifically address the need for information recovery by victims of the Troubles. We were disappointed with Together: Building a United Community Strategy produced by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, OFMDFM. It contained some commitments to deliver support services to victims and briefly examined the issues of memorialisation but did not address the issue of information recovery in a comprehensive fashion. Many families and individuals regard the reluctance to deal with human rights violations and breaches of the criminal law as affording ongoing immunity to the perpetrators of acts of violence during the Troubles. The corrosive effect that has had on societal confidence in policing the criminal justice system and in the current political system cannot be underestimated.

A great concern for WAVE is the continuing trauma being experienced by families who will try any possible avenue to gain the vital information. It is worth remembering that what has been established, and commonly referred to as a package of measures, did not grow from a coherent logical policy. It was established in reaction to sustained campaigning by families and individuals such as the families of the disappeared and the establishment of the independent commission. Over the past number of years families and campaigning organisations have attempted to use legal mechanisms, and publicity that surrounded high profile cases, as vehicles to uncover hidden truths or as a means to apply political or moral pressure to individuals or organisations that may be in possession of relevant information.

WAVE has worked with people who have had positive and negative experiences of the vari-

ous established investigative processes. It is important to acknowledge that some families have been satisfied. On contacting various bodies, they have expressed satisfaction with the work undertaken and found it valuable. Some families knew very little about the circumstances surrounding the death of their loved one so the opportunity to obtain some knowledge has brought comfort. In the recent high profile case of John Proctor, the Historical Enquiries Team reviewed the case, passed it to the PSNI to investigate and a conviction was obtained. The Proctor family have felt a great relief having obtained that degree of justice.

We acknowledge that good work has been carried out by individual officers investigating cases. However, some families who approached WAVE have raised legitimate concerns due to their experiences of the processes, many questioned how informative the reports produced are and there was a perception that some cases were treated differently from others. The recent report by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, HMIC, on the HET stated that the HET's overall approach was unacceptable.

The current piecemeal unco-ordinated processes impede collective understanding of what occurred during the period of conflict. The inherent insufficiencies and lack of coherence has failed to provide families and individuals with the information that they desperately need in order to begin the healing process. WAVE strongly advocates the development of a structured and comprehensive approach to end the relentless need for families and individuals to endlessly engage with process after process. We advocate that those who were injured in the Troubles have access to information. Some of the injuries were of a life-threatening nature. In other cases the injuries were obtained at the same time as a fatality occurred and reports have been prepared via some of the mechanisms that I outlined. The processes that currently attempt to examine the past do not address the issues. Even those that have a remit to examine the cases, such as the Office of the Police Ombudsman, have adopted a system of prioritisation that gives precedence to cases that resulted in a fatality over cases of injury. Many injured people are treated as mere witnesses to the event, denying them the recognition and acknowledge they deserve both legally and morally.

We would emphasise that all current mechanisms and any newly established measures must respond to the rights of those injured in the Troubles as well as those bereaved. We would argue that the consultative group on the past, commonly referred to as the Eames Bradley report, has been the best attempt to date to develop a consensus on these issues and try to find a holistic and inclusive way of addressing the past. While acknowledging that it had its shortcomings, the consultation and effort put into the report by the authors, civil society and victims to discuss painful issues should not be overlooked. The flaws within it, for example, the lack of provision or reference to injured victims could be overcome with further deliberation and thought.

We believe that a proper and respectful debate about the merits and potential problems of a proposed legacy commission and how it could be developed is the best starting point for these issues. An ethically sound, victim-focused information recovery mechanism could be cultivated from the proposals in this report. It is our opinion that this would add value to the existing mechanisms and supplement current processes dependent on the wishes of families and individuals.

Chairman: I thank Ms McCallan. I call Ms Anne Morgan to make her presentation.

Ms Anne Morgan: My name is Anne Morgan and I am a sister of Seamus Ruddy, who has been one of the disappeared for 29 years. There were seven known cases of people abducted in the course of the Troubles and secretly buried. However, that figure may be higher, given that

a few cases have come forward.

Given the circumstances of many of the cases, the families have been left isolated and vulnerable. It is only in recent years that we have begun to meet together. We formed a group called the Families of the Disappeared, which is supported through WAVE. WAVE has worked to connect the families through a variety of means. A yearly remembrance Mass is held on Psalm Sunday in St. Patrick's School, Armagh, at which the Cardinal usually officiates. The yearly event has brought immense comfort to those who continue to struggle with the pain and grief of loss, in addition to the lack of knowledge of the final resting place of their loved one.

We also have an All Souls silent walk at Stormont. The families lay a wreath on the steps of Stormont to show those who are working in Stormont that we have not gone away and that we need to be regarded as people to whom it is worthwhile to talk.

In addition, the families lobby by meeting with committees such as this one, political parties and special envoys. Other special events have been facilitated also to keep our families together.

Having come before this committee we must ask what it can do for us. This is an accurate, information driven process. Seven individuals are still missing. In my brother's case, he is reportedly buried in France. In the case of Sean Megraw, who is on my left, his brother, Brendan, is buried in Meath. There are three other cases in the areas of Meath and Navan. Kevin McKee, Seamus Wright and Joe Lynskey. Columba McVeigh is reportedly buried in Monaghan. Robert Nairac's remains are unknown.

The committee members can help by wearing a Forget-Me-Not badge, which we as a group have developed. I am wearing one of the badges, which is a representation of forget-me-not flowers to show that we exist. It is very important for people to wear it. We would like people to wear a badge, if they can do so, going about their daily work to remind people that we are still here. The committee can help us also by facilitating the Families of the Disappeared exhibition, which we hope will come to the South of Ireland and perhaps be located in its members' area.

We know there are individuals who have not spoken. The Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains, the ICLVR, is in place for information. That commission is the last of the Good Friday Agreement commissions.

This is unfinished business. We need publicity. We need people to remember that the disappeared remain disappeared. Two and a half million people watched the RTE-BBC documentary "The Disappeared" last month. Ten thousand people recently walked through the disappeared exhibition in Belfast City Hall. We hope that information has come, but we need the committee's support.

We thank the Irish Government and the British Government for their continued and valued support. Since 1999, the families of the disappeared have been given a voice, mainly through WAVE's support. In 1985, I received a death threat if I spoke about my brother's disappearance. That is why I am here now. I have been given a voice.

This committee can help us with our campaign to highlight the disappeared issue and to bring it to the attention of the politicians both North and South of the Border. Meeting with the members has helped me and has given me a voice.

Chairman: I thank Ms Morgan. I call on Ms Denise Mullen Fox to make her contribution.

Ms Denise Mullen Fox: I thank the Chairman for giving me the opportunity to address this committee. I will give the committee some background information on myself and then outline my connection with the peace factory. My father, Denis Mullen, was murdered by the Glenanne gang in 1975. He was one of more than 120 victims of that gang, which was a unit operating in Armagh and Tyrone, with the support of elements of the RUC and the UDR. Only one of its victims had any connection with violent republicanism. My father was an SDLP activist. He was Austin Currie's election agent. My mother, who they also tried to kill, was active in civil rights agitation from the mid-1960s. They fired 27 rounds at my father and he was hit 17 times. At four years of age, I sat with my dead father in a pool of blood on our doorstep. The Sterling sub-machine gun that killed him had been taken from the UDR base in Glenanne, in County Armagh. It was used to kill at least ten other people. There was never any police investigation into how that weapon got out of the UDR armoury into the hands of a murder gang. It was just one of hundreds that went the same route.

There are many stories like mine and they are listed in the recently published book *Lethal Allies*, by the journalist Anne Cadwallader. Her book was rejected as a work of fiction by some who bear responsibility for finding a way for our society to deal with its violent past yet if we were to adopt the balance of probability standard acceptable to Mr. Justice Smithwick, we would find collusion proving my father's mother and all the 121 cases. In reality, almost all of them would stand up to much more rigorous definition.

Fifteen years after the Good Friday Agreement there has been no effective progress on the area of victims and facing up to decades of violence. We have had 15 years of frozen stand-off because the main political decision-makers prefer to defend what they see as their vital political interests to present their version of the past, their own tailored narrative, rather than simply seek and accept the truth. To put it even more bluntly, they have things they want to continue to hide. They have friends they want to protect in the RUC, the UDR, the British Army or the Provisional IRA or among the informers who worked for two or more of those organisations. Thus, every attempt to debate victims or even to define who they are drowns in a wave of what-aboutery. This is what has happened to the most comprehensive attempt to face the past since the Eames Bradley proposals of 2009. We should watch what will happen to any specific or practical proposals put forward by Dr. Richard Haas.

The organisations that killed people share a common interest in letting this state of affairs continue. They and political parties will pursue their interests and neglect the victims. They pick over the bones of the dead, accepting some and rejecting others, championing some survivors and slandering others, fighting their dirty war all over again. There are those who would embrace me because my father was a victim of collusion while others reject me for the same reason. They reverse roles when it comes to the families of the disappeared. They are equally dishonest.

I sincerely hope that the Haass-O'Sullivan process will produce movement on dealing with the past but we face challenges from vested political interests and from victims groups which adopt a partisan approach. We cannot afford further years of stand-off. The committee can play a significant role in ensuring that decent services are provided to victims, that the pursuit of truth and dealing with the past are high on the agenda of the two Governments, the co-guarantors of the Good Friday Agreement. That is my background.

The Peace Factory is a similar organisation to WAVE. Everything that has been said by the witnesses is what the Peace Factory is about. We have a database that covers about 400 people. It represents a small tight knit community in Dungannon, Moy and the surrounding areas but

offers all of the same services as WAVE.

Chairman: I thank Ms Mullen Fox. I shall open the debate to Members and commence by calling Deputies Brendan Smith and Frank Feighan.

Deputy Brendan Smith: I thank the Chairman. A number of weeks I proposed that the committee ask groups to attend and make presentations. I am glad that my suggestion was unanimously accepted.

I compliment all of the witnesses on their presentations. Ms Mullen Fox and Ms Morgan have been exceptionally brave in discussing their particular circumstances and the tragedies experienced by both of their families. Recently I spoke with Ms Morgan's brother in Newry, on the subject of her brother's disappearance, so I am familiar with the details. I also heard Ms Mullen Fox make an outstanding presentation in Armagh recently. At the same meeting, Mr. Seamus Mallon, a very distinguished former parliamentarian and a great Irishman, gave a powerful presentation on the terrible tragedies that occurred in the area. He clearly stated who was responsible for the murders perpetrated in a triangle of areas.

Politicians, in general, have very good reasons not to praise the media. Earlier Ms Morgan referred to the powerful BBC-RTE documentary called "The Disappeared" which did a good public service. Similarly, the same applies to Anne Cadwallader's book which is extremely important. I do not think any of us have the words to give full vent to the anger and sorrow we all have regarding the tragedies that were inflicted on so many families. It is very important that the issues are kept to the fore as much as possible. Today's presentations are important and outline the need for people with any information to come forward and give it to the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains. Last night I spoke to Mr. Frank Murray who is the Irish commissioner, one of two in the organisation. He and his fellow commissioner colleague are determined to do everything that they can to progress the search for bodies and have been relentless in performing that task.

I am very familiar with the commission's work because its first commissioner was the late Tánaiste, John Wilson. John and I were very close political colleagues and personal friends. Deputy Joe O'Reilly was also a personal friend of John Wilson. I knew when the commission's work started how difficult it was going to be. It was the first time that the families of the victims had been spoken to or listened to, in any respect. John Wilson often gave me an outline of the issues that had been brought to his attention and the undemanding requests made by the families. He spoke only in general terms. He never put the matter on record and never spoke to me in specific details about a family or needs of the families. The message was always given that all the bereaved families wanted was to learn the location of the remains in order to give their loved ones a decent and proper burial, have a place to leave flowers and say a prayer. That is very undemanding coming from families who have lost people in the most horrific circumstances. It is horrific for anyone who must bear the burden and experience the tragedy of a murder. It is an added and particular cruelty to not know the burial place of loved ones.

I am sure that all of the committee members would be unanimous and call for persons with any bit of information to give it to the independent commission. That piece of information could be important. Time is against everybody who must deal with the issue because memories fade as every day passes. Perhaps the terrain will have changed due to farm work or access roads being improved or disimproving. All of those matters make the necessary task of locating the remains more difficult by the day.

The witnesses have been very brave to outline the tragedies that have afflicted their families in a public forum and with no closure. I know the phrase “no closure” is not the best phrase but I hope that the witnesses will understand the context. In this country we have a ritual of giving a person a decent burial, allowing people a time to grieve and having a place to say a prayer and lay flowers. The families of the disappeared have been denied that ritual. The issue is very important. I had a special debate on the issue in the Dáil where the Minister for Justice and Equality assured me that every resource would be given to the independent commission. The witnesses can be assured of that and it has the support of all political parties.

Ms Peake mentioned issues that arise today such as the threats made by so-called dissidents, or people who class themselves as dissidents. There does not seem to be a structure to deal with such threats. I ask her to elaborate on what she meant. If I understood Ms McCallan correctly, a strong theme ran through her contribution whereby the lack of information continues to inflict pain on people. I know the work done by both of the organisations and there are many individuals who support them. I wish them well in a very difficult task.

Chairman: I thank Deputy Smith. I call Deputy Frank Feighan and he shall be followed by Deputy Martin Ferris.

Deputy Frank Feighan: I welcome the delegations. This committee is conscious of trying to implement the Good Friday Agreement in order to bring peace to a very troubled area and to our country. We take our job very seriously. I am also a member of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly committee where I chair its sovereign committee that has prepared a report on the decade of commemorations. We are preparing a report on the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement. Our discussions have taken us to Belfast, Northern Ireland, across to Scotland and all across the island of Ireland.

The discussions have been fruitful but we must deal with the past and the legacy issues. In all of the details and discussions that have taken place, the Eames-Bradley report crops up all of the time. Some people thought it was a great idea. I have heard others to say as it was not their idea they will not agree with it. Also, the £12,000 recognition payment was seen as a very blunt instrument. A lot of time, discussions and cross-Border negotiations were taken on board and went into the Eames-Bradley report. Why did the report not get the traction that I believe it deserved? When talking to people behind the scenes, from all political parties and all groups in Northern Ireland, one hears that it was not a bad idea. Did politicians not take the lead? Were they fearful of taking a lead in something that people have told me is a good idea? The politicians decided that they did not want it because it was not their idea. The politicians should have taken the lead. Politicians are in a different zone now. I would like to hear the opinions from the witnesses on the report.

I watched the programme called “The Disappeared.” It brought home the message to people in the Republic who were not as familiar as they should have been with the suffering and legacy of the past. The committee must make an effort to try to deal with the legacy of the past. I ask for the views of the delegation on why the Eames-Bradley report did not succeed and on the Haass talks. The committee is absolutely committed to dealing fairly with all the aspects in our efforts to be helpful. This Government will not forget. Comments that we are only worried about our own economy could not be further from the truth.

Deputy Martin Ferris: I thank the delegates for their attendance and for their presentations. As part of the conflict resolution process it is incumbent on all of us to do everything possible to bring some form of closure to people who continue to be victims of that conflict. I

refer in particular to the families of the Disappeared. The loss of a loved one is a great sorrow for any family but the loss of the remains makes it all the more painful and that pain continues until such time as there is a recovery which will help to bring about an element of closure.

I am a former combatant. I know the efforts being made by many people to address the continuing injustice which the families have to endure. This committee and the party to which I belong have worked tirelessly in order to help in that regard. We have been successful in quite a number of instances but issues remain. I am certain that all members of this committee will join me in making the appeal to anyone with any information that can help to please come forward to help resolve this part of an issue which arose out of the conflict.

Regrettably the past cannot be changed and wrongs and injustices happened and cannot be undone. Recognition and acknowledgement are part of the process by which victims are able to deal with pain and injustice. I was very encouraged to hear how the trauma education process which is advocated by the delegation will filter through the wider system. A structured comprehensive approach was also advocated. I ask the delegates to elaborate on how the committee can be of assistance in the development of that approach.

The Sinn Féin Party has been advocating for a truth and reconciliation process because in my view before we can deal with all the outstanding aspects we will all need to own up to our responsibilities, irrespective of who we are and to help with the collective healing of our communities. It is a significant and onerous undertaking. I am reliably informed that the truth and reconciliation process in South Africa has been very helpful for both the victims and for the combatants. I ask for the views of the delegates. No effort should be spared to bring about the recovery of the Disappeared. We all have an obligation to do our utmost to bring that about.

Deputy Joe O'Reilly: I wish to pay tribute to the courage of Anne Morgan and Denise Mullen Fox and all the delegates for speaking out in public about their situation. It is not easy and certainly not easy in formal settings such as this committee meeting. I congratulate them for their excellent presentations which they have delivered with great passion and personal sincerity.

I was happy that the Minister for Justice and Equality, Deputy Alan Shatter, was able to assure my constituency colleague, Deputy Brendan Smith, that the funding for the victims commission would remain in place. I join with Deputy Smith from the Cavan-Monaghan constituency - where all of this is very real - in saying that this is a very sensitive and important issue in our constituency. We have a pride in County Cavan in the fact that the first Victims Commissioner was a distinguished Cavan man, the former Tánaiste, John Wilson, a very distinguished academic and national politician. That fact gives us an extra interest in the work of the commission which must be supported and continued.

Of course we understand that the families should be able to have the normal bereavement process, that they all should have a grave to visit. Those of us who have the privilege of a grave to visit find it very therapeutic to attend the blessing of the graves in our religious tradition and to visit the grave on Sundays. The delegates deserve the same as the very minimum.

It is very disappointing that the families know the broad locations of where people are buried but do not have more precise information. I ask the delegates to comment on this aspect and to explain what precise information is available to them. It seems the location cannot be reached in a number of cases. I have to ask the question whether the delegates are receiving the co-operation they believe they should be getting from members of the Provisional movement.

I know that Denise Mullen Fox does not have to deal with a disappeared victim but I ask if she is receiving support from the State services.

Are the families of the Disappeared receiving the requisite co-operation? Are the views expressed by Deputy Ferris typical? Is there a real effort to find the information that the families need? We need to know because the committee would have no point in meeting today if that question is not addressed in a clear way. I ask the delegates to explain the gaps or lacunae in the information being provided to them. Who is responsible for them? Does more precise information exist which the families are not receiving? If so, who is keeping it from them and why? This has to be examined at this committee because otherwise this meeting will be sadly a farce. It is our job to address that aspect in order to be of assistance. This meeting is being broadcast live which means the matter will gain some media focus, in the same way as the recent evocative television programme. This is an important question.

I will move from the issue of the disappeared to Ms Mullen Fox's point on collusion in the Glenanne case. What level of State recognition or support has she received?

Ms McCallan stated that a structured process needed to be in place for the bereaved. What would that structured process be? If the centre is not adequately resourced, what is the gap?

The numbers are large. If I heard Ms McCallan correctly, she stated that 1,200 families in the Coalisland-Dungannon area had been affected. Perhaps she might clarify. The number is extraordinarily high.

What precisely is a trauma education programme? Where would it be administered, who would administer it, how long would it last, what would it cost and what would be the outcome? What have been the outcomes to date elsewhere?

I congratulate the Chairman on convening this meeting and Deputy Smith on proposing it. It is a painful day for everyone in the room, but it will be of no help if we do not get a clear sense from our guests as to where they believe they stand and where they believe their problems lie.

Chairman: I will hand back to the delegation, starting with Ms Peake.

Ms Sandra Peake: Ms Mullen Fox and I will share the questions. I will start by paying tribute to the Minister for Justice and Equality, Deputy Shatter, and his equivalent in the North for their support for and commitment to continuing funding for the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains. This crucial process has worked when adequate information has been in place. This relates to our point on ensuring an information-led process, which is what is required.

I will start with the question on what is a trauma education programme. This may also answer Deputy Ferris's question. Such a programme equips us in order to ensure that we are more responsive to the needs of those who have been directly impacted by the Troubles. In terms of training social workers, it has been quite a fascinating-----

Deputy Joe O'Reilly: What would happen? Does it involve counselling, lectures or so on? What is the procedure? People would need to know what their money was going towards.

Ms Sandra Peake: There are three levels to it, the first being accredited ten-week programmes on, for example, grief, trauma, the helping relationship, compassion, fatigue and the cost to people working in this field. These are distinct courses. Information is also provided on

the very prominent link between trauma and addiction. We have a suite of eight community-based courses across a range of venues, which provide people with accreditation and equip them to have a greater awareness of the subject areas in question.

The BSc programme at Queen's University Belfast covers a broad area around psychosocial responses, which is about recognising the role of treatment modalities, but at a wider level is also about how a societal response can be best encouraged.

The professional development level involves victim and survivor trainers, supplemented by lectures, instructing social work students, nursing students and teachers for two weeks to make them more responsive to and aware of the issues presented by victims and survivors who they will meet. This has been fascinating, as many of the social work students are 18 or 19 years of age and are asking why they must do this, seeing as how the Troubles are over. By week two, they are reporting that they understand why, for example, their aunts are the way they are, they had not realised what had happened in their families and that the course has been beneficial.

The programme is evaluated by practice users and clinical teachers, who state that they have seen an improvement in practice. Social workers and, hopefully, nurses are more responsive towards the people they meet.

Deputy Smith asked about threats. The worrying trend is that this matter does not just relate to dissidents. At a broader level, it also relates to loyalist intimidation and threats, in that individuals and families are presenting under threat. The difficulty lies in how the threat is verified. It is verified by the police, who come to our door and ask where the people can go and how they can stay safe. For example, the police service asks about what it can do as regards young fellows whose names have appeared on lists. Where are these people safe and who will take responsibility for them? This issue has proven difficult. We have considered which providers in our community might take them, but they understandably will not open themselves up to the risk of accepting people who are under threat. We would argue that the process of verifying threats and providing meaningful support needs to be examined as a matter of urgency. People are distressed. It is an increasing problem among those who present to us.

I will ask Ms McCallan to answer the question on a comprehensive process.

Regarding the Eames-Bradley group, the payment of £12,000 sadly became the story for the media and effectively shut the process down before anyone considered the wider report, which also suggested a range of mechanisms for dealing with the past. As an organisation, we must take account of the fact that, while the £12,000 was an issue for the people in WAVE, it was not for many more. They asked why no one was speaking for them in that debate. This is the sad reality. In some ways, the report went to ground and should have been back on the table much sooner.

Mr. Dennis Godfrey: I will add a point about the Eames-Bradley report. At the material time, I was a senior official in the Northern Ireland Office when Mr. Peter Hain set up the Eames-Bradley commission and also while Mr. Shaun Woodward was Secretary of State. The report was never formally shelved by the British Government. As the committee knows, the £12,000 payment created a major political firestorm. In an attempt to save the rest of the report, we felt that we had to distance ourselves from the payment. In fact, we made the announcement on the way to a Northern Ireland Affairs Committee meeting on which Dr. Alasdair McDonnell may well have been sitting. Thereafter, the politics of the greater issue of devolving policing and justice took over. In a sense, the report sat there.

There was not a good history of measures being imposed from the centre, particularly in these complex and sensitive issues. Our view was that there needed to be a consensus at a local level. The Deputy is right, in that, while I will not say that no one made an attempt to build a consensus, it simply never emerged. There is a strong sense now that the Eames-Bradley report is back on Dr. Haass's desk in some shape or form. All is not lost. Certainly, all of that work is not lost.

Ms Mary McCallan: Deputy Ferris asked about a structured and comprehensive approach to dealing with these issues. He mentioned the South African approach of truth and reconciliation. We would say that the Eames-Bradley recommendations are the structured approach. In the discussions within our sector as well as the human rights sector since the report was finalised, people have been of the opinion that, despite the report's limitations, for example, the lack of provision for injured people, the defects could be remedied and the process itself was deep and comprehensive and had buy-in from quite a few victims. It was unfortunate that, because of the £12,000 proposal put forward, the matter did not progress in the manner people had expected. The view was that it was very much the best starting point we would have if we wanted to build some kind of legacy commission to address these issues. Why did it not receive the attention it deserved and was it an issue of political will? I do not know but that is possible. It is also possible that other things took over and that this was the reason for what happened. I can only echo what Mr. Godfrey said, namely, we get the impression that it is capable of being examined again. Victims and survivors are very much asking whether it can be looked at again. There are many positives to it. People were involved in the consultation relating to it, which is important, and they will want to look at it on that basis.

Deputy Smith referred to a lack of information continuing to inflict pain. This has very much been an issue. As Ms Peake indicated, our referrals have been consistent year on year and there were people who were referred to us on foot of the Eames-Bradley proposals being reported in the media. Issues arose with regard to the information required and how those involved wanted to seek it. In the course of our work we have witnessed the difference it makes to people when their outstanding questions are answered. Obtaining answers does not necessarily give them closure but it does give them the space to put things to one side and develop their lives in a way that encompasses the grief they continue to experience. It also allows them to move on and build other things into their lives, rather than feeling that they are being disloyal to family members by not trying to discover details in respect of what happened to them. In the context of the structure, we would be in favour of the Eames-Bradley proposals with some specific add-ons in respect of injured people. The latter form a large part of our client base.

Dr. Alasdair McDonnell: I do not want to say too much because I am familiar with victims. I spent 30 years working as a GP and I often dealt with victims in a private or medical capacity. I know the trauma experienced by every victim. I am well aware that no two victims and no two sets of circumstances are exactly the same but that familiar or similar trends arise in respect of both.

I wish to ask a very simple, general question and I would like as many of our guests as possible who feel able to do so to answer it. I am interested in teasing out a particular outcome in the context of these proceedings. Will the various groups indicate how the Deputies and Senators gathered here - who have a very genuine interest in this matter - might provide practical assistance to them in their mission to obtain closure in respect of a number of these cases? What might be an acceptable solution for victims and survivors? I was a very firm supporter of the Eames-Bradley process and I am keen to see it resurrected. Would that process be suf-

ficient or would add-ons be required in respect of survivors who are injured? The hostility to the Eames-Bradley process was shocking. It was frightening in many ways that people could get so angry. Like Ms Peake, I felt that 95% of the Eames-Bradley proposals were very solid. I informed Dr. Richard Haass of that fact and he has taken my views on board. I am aware that the Eames-Bradley process is now well up on the agenda. Would the Eames-Bradley process be sufficient? In that context, we must ask how we get to the next stage.

I wish to pose a specific question to Ms Mullen Fox which I would have thought would be of interest to many of our colleagues. I am not sure whether everyone present has knowledge of the Glenanne gang. Is it possible to connect the latter to the Dublin and Monaghan bombings? In the context of victims, the Glenanne gang was responsible for carrying out quite a few murders within the jurisdiction of this State.

Mr. Conor Murphy: I will not repeat what others have said. I echo Deputy Martin Ferris's comments on the absolute responsibility of anyone in possession of information which might assist in the recovery of people's remains to bring it forward. I reiterate the appeal he made in respect of that matter.

Our guests are welcome. I have had an opportunity to meet many people involved with the groups before the committee. A couple of broad issues arise, including those which relate to truth and justice. It must be stated that justice means different things to different victims. It also means different things to the families of victims. I accept the point Mr. Godfrey made in respect of the rejection of the Eames-Bradley process by the Northern Ireland Office, NIO, and the British State on the basis that until there was sufficient consensus, it could not be proceeded with further. If that approach had been taken previously, there would not have been a Good Friday Agreement and we would not be sitting in this room now. There is a responsibility on those who occupy positions of leadership to go forward rather than hanging back. I have had conversations with NIO Ministers and I am aware that this masks the hostility to a truth recovery process within the British state. That matter must be tackled. There is an onus on all of us to create a process which is about providing as much closure as possible or about giving people the information that will assist them in achieving closure.

The justice issue is perhaps more complicated because people have different ideas about what constitutes justice. Even within families, there are differing views as to what justice means. I am interested in discovering our guests' position in respect of the idea that consensus will be required - this remains the official position of the British state - before we can begin to explore these matters. I do not believe such consensus is either possible or achievable. I am of the opinion that we have a responsibility to try to lead and to deal with as many of the issues relating to victims as possible. We must also seek to reduce the numbers of those our guests represent and who continue to be affected.

The other matter to which I wish to refer is victims services. Ms Peake stated that the WAVE Trauma Centre does occasional work in Dublin. Does this State provide any formal or practical support for that work? Mr. McDonnell, MP, referred to the Dublin and Monaghan bombings. The Justice for the Forgotten has strongly criticised the level of support it has received. Are our guests aware of what levels of practical support are available to victims or relevant organisations on this side of the Border?

Those are the questions I wish to pose. Many of the other issues have already been covered. I thank our guests for attending and for the presentations they made.

Deputy Jack Wall: I welcome our guests. I have met representatives from most of the groups involved - if not those who are present - on various visits to Northern Ireland. The stories they tell in respect of their own circumstances and the various cases with which they are dealing are extremely sad. I was surprised when Ms Peake indicated that the figure for new referrals last year was 550. That is a huge number. I do not wish to be misunderstood but what is the success rate in respect of such referrals? When I use the phrase "success rate", I am seeking to discover that with which people are satisfied. Is it just the case that they want to tell their stories? Do they want to be part of Ms Peake's group - the purpose of which is to create a wider family of people who have been affected by the Troubles - in order to obtain some type of solace and consolation?

Many groups in the North appear to have specific and good intentions in respect of the communities they represent but funding seems to be a problem for all of them. What is the position in the context of funding?

I was delighted to hear about the education programmes. Education is the first step on the ladder that will get us out of this. If we do not educate ourselves as well as those who are close to us and helpful to us, we will not make the progress that is necessary. We cannot continually look back as other generations must be cared for and given hope. Education is a major factor in preparing the next generations and we must ensure they enjoy the benefits of education.

Ms Peake referred to Unionists, loyalists, Nationalists and Catholics. While I am aware these labels do not matter to her, it would be interesting to learn how many people have sought help and to ascertain if there is a cross-over. The cross-over, of itself, is beneficial in overcoming some of the problems that have been generated.

I visited an exhibition on the disappeared which was simple yet told an important story. The day I visited families of the disappeared were present to tell each individual story. This was the strength of the exhibition; having the families present to tell their simple but important story. I have thought of it on numerous occasions since my visit. I was struck by the simple photographs, each with a short line at the bottom. One could easily pass the photographs but they become extremely significant when one is told what lies behind them. I am aware that efforts are under way to bring the exhibition to the South. It should move around the country in order that people get a sense of the necessity to address the problem. I hope this is done soon.

We heard about a number of reports that bodies were buried in County Meath. We must be positive and constructive in as far as possible. The sooner the exhibition is brought here, the better. I appreciate the attendance of the witnesses. In fairness to the Chairman, the joint committee has taken a progressive approach and wants to help and engage. Members have visited the North on numerous occasions to meet and interact with representatives of various groups, irrespective of whether they were loyalist, Unionist, Nationalist, Catholic or anything else.

I thank the delegations for coming and hope this meeting will be of some assistance to them. I also hope further efforts will be made to bring the exhibition to the South. The joint committee should consider what it could do to move forward on the issue of victims. One can talk for a long time but talk must be backed up with action.

The issue of funding arose. We must examine every aspect of this issue. We do not know what small measures could help. Having been involved in many associations, I do not believe there is such a thing as a bad committee. Every committee in which I have been involved achieved something. If this committee achieves something, we will be able to look back in

future and state we responded positively to what we heard today and on other occasions.

Deputy Seán Crowe: I welcome the delegation. It is hard to believe it is 15 years since the Good Friday Agreement was signed. For the majority of people, the Agreement brought an end to war. Many viewed it as a triumph of dialogue and politics over violent conflict. At that time, people spoke of inclusion as opposed to exclusion, making a new beginning, looking at things differently and trying to address the hurt that many people suffered. Unfortunately, what we have heard from our guests is that we have not even agreed on the definition of a victim. This is part of the difficulty. We heard, for example, that the media focused on one aspect of the Eames-Bradley process but politicians also did so. I do not know why some politicians do not want the issue discussed. A dialogue needs to take place and we need a structure for examining the past. While we cannot change the past, it is pulling us back and preventing us from moving forward. Some parties and individuals continue to look to the past, even if that is understandable.

Anniversaries and commemorations are taking place virtually on a weekly basis. In addition to the large commemorations, victims will also mark occasions such as the anniversaries and birthdays of loved ones who died. This issue is not being addressed.

The hierarchy of victims is an issue because we cannot agree on who is a victim. It is clear from the comments on who is acceptable as a victim that there is a hierarchy of victims. This is all part of the discussion that needs to take place.

I assume the organisations before us are trying to achieve a number of objectives. It is important, for example, that the hurt inflicted in the past is not repeated. We heard from our guests that threats continue. Politicians on this island and in these islands need to address this issue.

We were promised a new beginning but a number of outstanding issues have not been addressed. This and the absence of an inclusive society are causing hurt. Ms Morgan represents the disappeared. That her family was treated differently within the broader group of families of the disappeared demonstrates differences in the treatment of victims. We need to establish some mechanism to allow people to raise individual cases. People looked at the South Africa model, yet some people in South Africa had difficulties with the truth commission process there. Unless we devise some structure or platform for addressing this issue, we will return to the issue in 15 years and people will still feel hurt about their families and loved ones. This creates difficulties in the process. Clearly, work needs to be done on the victims issue and I hope the Haass recommendations will allow people to find common ground.

We can learn from the past. We hear that people thought the conflict was over but tension and conflict remains. The onus is on all of us to produce solutions to this problem. I assume Ms Morgan hopes that her appearance at this meeting will trigger a memory in someone who may then come forward with information. It is important that the joint committee reiterate that any information passed to the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains cannot be used in a court of law or transmitted to any other agency and that those passing on such information have absolute immunity in respect of such information. That message must go out from this meeting. Representatives of the independent commission met the joint committee to outline the ongoing work of the commission. Its work depends on those who have information on the disappeared providing such information. We all appeal to those who have information to please come forward.

Deputy Séan Conlan: I welcome the delegations. What would be the best resolution for

victims and their families, more so than the protagonists?

I want to ask a question about the level of co-operation with people who may have information. What can be done to advance that? The question of an amnesty is a thorny one. This possibility has been mentioned in cases like the Dublin and Monaghan bombings, the killings in south Armagh and the Disappeared. What really needs to happen here? What would be the witnesses' attitude to something of this nature that would allow the truth to emerge? I am sure there are people who have information but fear that it could be used against them if they were to provide it. Many victims and families might find it abhorrent if those who provide information were to receive an amnesty. I want to get a view from the witnesses of what needs to be done, or can be done, to get a resolution for the families.

Mr. Eugene Reavey: The work of Eames and Bradley was badly hampered by the definition of "victim" that was imposed on them by the British authorities. My problem was that the victim and the perpetrator were seen in the same light. I suppose I have come away from that to some extent over time. Perhaps I am seeing things in a better light. Some work could be done in this area to close the gap. I have heard the word "closure" three or four times this morning. I normally associate the word "closure" with politicians and press reporters. I seldom hear a victim talking about closure. In my vocabulary, I do not know what closure means because I will not get closure until we get answers to the questions we have been asking for many years.

People asked about the Glenanne gang. I live in the immediate area. The UDR station was less than a mile from my home. Three of my brothers were murdered by members of the Glenanne gang in 1976. I have to say the circumstances were very suspicious. On the night in question, there were checkpoints on all the roads leading to our house. The police and the army say that the checkpoints were not legal. If they were not legal checkpoints, they must have been illegal checkpoints. In later years, I came to know which members of the gang carried out those murders. Séamus Mallon lived in Markethill. The word was on the street in Markethill over the next couple of days. In fact, a publican from Markethill told my father the names of the people who murdered his sons. He lived for 15 years after that. He only told me those names two or three days before he died. Guns went missing from Glenanne. It was no surprise.

A good few of those who were in the Glenanne gang were members of the Glenanne UDR centre. The Dublin and Monaghan bombings were carried out by the same gang. I have had many hours of discussions with the historical inquiries team about all of this. There is no doubt that the Glenanne gang carried out the Dublin and Monaghan bombings. We have been asked whether we get enough information from people in the North. Perhaps the people in the South would say they did not get enough information from the authorities in the South about this incident.

Perhaps the Historical Enquiries Team had its difficulties. I do not know all the politics of it. I can say that in the Reavey case, the Historical Enquiries Team was the finest group of officers I have ever met. Mr. Cox was the first man who ever went in to shake my mother's hand. It took 30 years. He said on behalf of the British Government and the British authorities that he was sorry for the deaths of her sons. No police officer ever came to her. She never had any therapy. She had nothing. When her sons were killed, two of them were on the sick over Christmas. She was not entitled to compensation because the British Government was paying their wages for the couple of weeks in question and she did not suffer any financial loss. The other young fellow, who was 18, lived for two or three weeks before he died. The coroner said that he died from natural causes. We fought that as best we could. Some 35 years later, Mr. Cox showed me where the coroner changed his report three days after the original inquest. Never in the history

of the state of Northern Ireland has an inquest report been changed other than by going back and having another court case or something.

When one talks about collusion, one must wonder how far it went. Mr. Cox will testify that the collusion went as far as the Attorney General. We have evidence of that in the case of the Rock Bar attack. The barrister for the UDR and the police, which carried out those shootings, said he had obtained a *nolle prosequi* sentence. The only person who can authorise a *nolle prosequi* is the Attorney General. As the members of this committee will be aware, the Attorney General is in touch with the Prime Minister many times every day. It turned out that all those involved in that case got off. It was subsequently proven by the historical inquiries team that they were the perpetrators of that bombing and shooting.

There are 120 cases of collusion with regard to the Glenanne gang. I am told that another 17 cases are pending. I do not know how the RUC could not link those cases. It had all the forensics. There was a pool of guns and a mixture of guns would be used in one murder or another. I listened to Assistant Chief Constable White on TV. He said that the historical inquiries team gleaned this information from the police files. It would never have left those files if it had not been for the historical inquiries team. If the authorities here have any information about the Glenanne cases in their files, I encourage and plead with them to hand it over to the appropriate authorities in Northern Ireland

Ms Denise Mullen Fox: I will follow up on Deputy O'Reilly's question. Five people were involved in my father's case. One of them was an RUC man. The others were all UDR men. My father was the first person to be murdered with guns stolen from the Glenanne army base. A further ten people were killed by those using the guns in question. I had a positive experience with the Historical Enquiries Team. It is a process that opens up the channels for one. It depends on where one takes it after that. The team will tell one that these things can be very daunting. I can show the committee what my father's case file looks like. It consists of several pieces of paper that were scrunched up and had to be straightened out. A few days before my father was murdered, a man came to the house dressed as a nun basically to survey the house. He turned out to be a UDR man. We have now established where that uniform came from, right down to the rosary beads. It came from a UDR base.

I wish to comment on the drawbacks I have experienced in bringing my case through the legal system. Even though I am fully entitled to legal aid if one went by a brochure setting out how one is entitled to it, legal aid have put the blocks on because I am suing five State bodies through my solicitor Kevin Winters. Last week, I got a letter to say that there would be a hearing on 19 December 2013. Two days later, a letter came to say that this had now been changed. That has been the case for almost a year and a half. I am told that we could have something in January but until I am sitting there, I will not believe it. As Mr. Reavey said, I absolutely hate the word "closure". It is accountability I need. I am asking the committee to help me and other families get accountability.

Ms Anne Morgan: I would like to answer a few questions that came up. The responsibility of this committee is to highlight our issue both North and South and to those who have the answers to the location of our loved ones' bodies. In my case, my brother is buried in France so it is very difficult for my family to access the French authorities in any way. If anyone in the committee knows a way of getting to the area where our Seamus is buried which is called Pont de l'Arche outside Rouen, I would be very happy to work with them. In our case, as we are out of the jurisdiction both North and South and in Great Britain, we as a family need that extra support which we have not had at all. Since 1985, I have written religiously and quietly to the

Department of Foreign Affairs in the South. I tried my best to keep Seamus's name alive and I hope I have done that through the campaign and that the committee can help us as a family in some small way to overcome the issues we are facing which relate to getting into the French situation.

On a broader issue, we as families need always to hear that the members are giving us support even if it is only mentioning us when they are doing interviews or in their constituencies. We continually need to hear that people are thinking about us. Even that in a small way is very important so we can continue this struggle. As members have said, recovering and burying a body and going to a graveside are so important. It really is very important. I hope that all the families of the disappeared will receive their loved ones back and we will be able to give them Christian burials. If that day does come, I would like all the members to come to those burials.

Mr. Sam Megraw: One question concerned information. Obviously, we do not have all the information we want but it is very difficult for us to answer that question because the information goes to the commission which cannot pass it on to us. It can speak to us in general terms but because of confidentiality, it cannot give us specific information. However, we do know that there was an event down in Orristown about six weeks ago at which Frank Murray, the commissioner, spoke. He said they know there is at least one person who was involved with the burials at Wilkinstown bog who has not come forward. It is important that they be encouraged and pressurised if necessary to come forward. They are obviously not listening to appeals. We would ask that some grassroots intervention and encouragement could be made in the Meath area to bring them forward. Although they are involved with Wilkinstown, that person may also be aware of the situation at Orristown as well. There needs to be some grassroots intervention at these localities. The other one is up at Emyvale in Monaghan. The number of sites is actually quite small so the number of people involved is small. It is important that a big effort be made locally to encourage these people to come forward. I thank the members for their attention.

Ms Sandra Peake: In respect of Deputy Crowe's comment about support, those who are here have said that they are not eligible for the newly created victims service created by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. That is an area that probably needs to be reconsidered. Deputy Crowe mentioned that it has been 15 years since the Good Friday Agreement and the fact that past issues are so present. It was 11 years before three of the bodies of the disappeared were recovered. They included Peter Wilson who disappeared in 1973, Charlie Armstrong who disappeared in 1980 and Gerry Evans who disappeared in 1979. Those bodies were recovered within a short space of time. That highlighted the fact that this is not an easy process. It takes time, commitment and tenacity to keep coming back and the families have had to do that time and time again. That is not without its cost to them. The last surviving mother of one of those who remain missing, Mrs. McKee, died 18 months ago. It is no secret because the family has shared it but she died a woman who had long-term difficulties arising from the abduction of her son. Many of the mothers have put their sons' names on headstones and, therefore, handed the mantle of responsibility to the siblings. That is something that must be considered. The message is there - please bring these people home. The other sad reality is that we have a new victims and survivors service that has sought to medicalise matters and exclude siblings. The siblings in the families of the disappeared are carrying this forward and are excluded from assistance. We have highlighted the difficulties those policies and decisions create for individuals.

The sad reality is that we have a system whereby the funding is for a maximum of two years. The Peace Factory is now without funding for the important work they do for victims

and survivors and quite frankly, it is not good enough. We lose good staff and build up capacity. You are never sure whether you are able to keep going beyond a certain period and I would urge this committee to urge those responsible to bring in a firm arrangement to ensure that the community sector, which is a Cinderella sector but does valuable and much-needed work, is funded adequately on the basis so that it does not continue to lose good people who are trained and then move on because they may need to. They need that continuity. That is something that is very important.

We have also brought the Families of the Disappeared book with us and have copies for people here. Those books have been published by the families through WAVE and tell the stories of a number of families. We are happy for those to be given to members. Education is key. The reality is that we often treat people like an abnormality when it is the situation faced by many people that is the abnormality. How they experience it is not the abnormality. They are experiencing the normal reaction to something that was totally abnormal. Every day, a scar is unpicked for somebody. Language, gestures and commemoration are important. We have seen those events more recently causing people to count the sores and we must show care, sensitivity and support. We have to show care, sensitivity and support in dealing with those issues. That would be my key message to everybody around the table today. It is a key consideration.

The plight of the families of the disappeared is not a contested issue but a humanitarian issue. The Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains has acknowledged the support that has been forthcoming in this regard, which is very important. Our plea would be to revisit the sites where information is needed and to do so without delay.

Chairman: Does Ms Mullen Fox wish to add anything?

Ms Denise Mullen Fox: Thank you, Chairman. Following on from what Ms Peake said, I draw members' attention to the situation in regard to the Victims and Survivors Service. There is a serious difficulty in that the service it provides is means tested and applicants are required to attend for an hour's interview to establish whether or not they are, in fact, a victim. My mother, who was shot but survived, cannot access any service from the VSS, whether it be counselling, the holiday package or anything else, because she is in receipt of a working pension. Likewise, my brother, because he has a full-time job as a teacher, cannot access any support through the VSS. The service is absolutely flawed.

Deputy Joe O'Reilly: I have a final comment to make, with the Chairman's permission. It was very interesting to hear from Mr. Megraw that there is somebody out there with information about the Wilkinstown site. That is worthy of emphasis. The individual in question should be approached and assured that he or she can speak to the commission in confidence and with immunity, without any adverse personal consequences. It behoves anybody who could make that approach to do so.

Chairman: I thank witnesses and members for their input. There was some discussion around the role of this committee. Deputy Wall summed it up well in pointing out that we are trying to reach out as best we can, which includes our visits to Belfast and Dungannon and to Derry in the new year. We intend to continue that engagement. We are absolutely delighted to be able to reach out to the witnesses today, and their attendance is a very good start to another branch of engagement. I thank Deputy Smith and Mr. McDonnell for their work with the clerk and other committee staff to facilitate this meeting. We are grateful to the witnesses for their engagement with us and for sharing their personal stories. We are all conscious of the famous observation, from whom I cannot recall, that if we do not learn from the mistakes of the past we

are condemned to repeat them in the future. That is something of which we are very conscious.

We as a committee are very much focused on the next generation and on issues such as education, social policy, housing and so on. We are also acutely aware, however, of our responsibility to this generation and to people in similar situations to the witnesses. We have learnt a great deal from our discussion today, particularly in terms of our responsibility not only to those bereaved during the conflict but also to those who suffered physical harm. That has come across loud and clear today.

Wording and jargon are always an issue when one is dealing with such sensitive legacy issues. It is helpful to hear that while the concept of closure is important for some people - certainly for many of the people to whom we have spoken - there are also people who are primarily concerned with accountability and other issues. I was brought up near a fishing village and still live on the coast and, as such, I am familiar with the consolation for families that comes from retrieving the bodies of loved ones after a tragic drowning. There is a correlation there with what Ms Morgan and Mr. Megraw are saying in terms of the seven bodies that have not been recovered. We as a committee are asking once again, in this public forum, that anybody who has any evidence or information which might help the families would come forward. We will continue to champion the witnesses' cause. At Government level, officials from the Department of Justice and Equality and the Department of the Taoiseach will be listening to the contributions today. If there is anything we can do in terms of collaborating with the French Government, we will be happy to support Ms Morgan in that regard.

We are dealing with complex and multifaceted legacy issues. Mr. Richard Haass and his team have an important job to do and we certainly would not wish to interfere by telling them what they need to do. I hope, however, that the contributions of witnesses and members today will be of value to Mr. Haass in his deliberations. Everybody in this room, and everybody North and South and throughout the United Kingdom, wishes to see a better Northern Ireland. We sometimes have a tendency to dismiss the progress that has been made in the past 15 years. At the same time, however, there is much work that remains to be done. We look forward to working with the witnesses in the future. We try to operate as honest brokers and our door is open to everybody. We are delighted to have the witnesses in Dublin and will help them in any way we can, including in respect of the exhibition to which Deputy Wall referred.

The joint committee adjourned at 12.40 p.m. until Thursday, 16 January 2014.