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***“So what was all The Troubles for? Why did so many people lose their lives in the fight against terrorism?”***

## ***Victims left out again in cold says local support Group***

***RATHFRILAND-based Victims Support Group, South Down Action for Healing Wounds, has hit out at the DUP for entering a devolved Government too soon with Sinn Fein. A spokesperson for the organisation said: “Once again victims and their families have been left in the cold in the quest for peace and ostracised by political representatives”. The spokesperson went on to say: “ South Down Action for Healing Wounds was established in 1999, at a time when innocent victims of terrorist violence needed support and to have their voices heard.***

***“It was a time when they were being ignored while the perpetrators of violence were reaping many benefits, including early release from jail sentences.”***

***Continuing, they said: “It’s even more disappointing now eight years later, to have to say that the organisation such as ours are the poor relations of the Peace Process.***

***“As we continue to provide the necessary support to numerous families throughout South Down, we are still witnessing perpetrators being handed every demand on a plate.***

***“For example, the recent announcement that the UDA could potentially receive a £1.2m peace package as a means of paying them off to keep them quiet is disgusting.***

***“Then, to witness the DUP embracing Sinn Fein-IRA and preparing to meet in a future Government, is shocking to say the least.***

***“Yet, we as an organisation have to continually fight for some of the most basic needs of the innocent victims and their families.***

***“The DUP don’t seem to have any problems meeting with terrorists now, the spokesperson continued, “yet whenever we request a meeting to lobby for our people, they don’t have time.***

***“On a recent occasion they hadn’t even the manners to reply to our correspondence, nor had they time to meet with us, despite numerous telephone calls.”***

***“So what was all The Troubles for? Why did so many people lose their lives in fight against terrorism?” the spokesperson asked. “These are the many questions being asked of the families associated with the organisation.”***

***The spokesperson continued: “Ian Paisley said in his statement on Monday last week that we must not allow our justified loathing of the horrors and tragedies of the past to become a barrier to creating a better and more stable future.***

***“Well, perhaps the DUP would like to sit down again with the families who have suffered the most and tell them that perhaps the anguish and suffering that each of them experience every single day could be interpreted as a barrier to creating a better future***

***“Or maybe political parties have forgotten the numerous coffins that have been carried to graveyards throughout Northern Ireland? The innocent victims have tried to create a better future, their loved ones being murdered, maimed and injured in the process. They are the ones who have paid the ultimate price for peace.”***

***In conclusion, the spokesperson said: “It’s sickening to think that politicians have being tripping over each other this last number of weeks prior to and after the St Andrew’s talks, running scared of Peter Hain and Tony Blair’s threats.***

***“Yet, in the mayhem of it all, no consideration is given to the needs of the victims and their families.***

***“We, the victims, are not against the Peace Process, nor do we want to see another generation experience the trauma that we have witnessed. However, we believe that the DUP have moved too soon, and should have waited until they were assured that the IRA Army Council were disbanded for ever.”***