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ATTWOOD: MANY CONCERNS ON EAMES/BRADLEY PROPOSALS

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In a preliminary response to the Eames/Bradley proposals West Belfast MLA Alex Attwood said:

“The SDLP will assess each and every proposal by Eames/Bradley against one crucial standard – will our society address the legacy of the past and move forward on an ethical basis? The SDLP urges all to adopt this approach and identify if Eames/Bradley offers a roadmap for the future. The Consultative Group on the Past is a serious group of people, who have earned a serious response. That is what the SDLP will do.

“A crucial ethical standard is if the proposals will bring truth and justice to the many who seek it? Eames/Bradley outline a number of ways this may be attained – the SDLP will judge if these proposals represent a bigger, better, faster way to achieve the truth and justice required for a society to heal itself and to offer hope to victims and survivors. It was welcome and important that Eames/Bradley have stated today that the potential for justice through criminal prosecution remains open and no one would be deprived of this right. This is the right approach. This cannot be denied to victims and survivors.

“However, the SDLP is anxious about the suggestion that somehow “a line might be drawn” after five years - in effect a sort of amnesty- in relation to past crimes.” This proposal is arbitrary and disregards international best practice that amnesty, at least for grave crimes, cannot be given.

“There has been heightened concern in recent days around payments to victims. The SDLP believe that victims and survivors have requirements, including financial, and that these requirements should be addressed against need and individual circumstances. Independent of the Eames/Bradley proposal for a recognition payment, this is a real challenge for decades to come.

That said, there is such a level of concern about the recognition payment among many people and levels of doubt from others that the recognition payment is an issue that requires to be revisited to determine if it can or cannot earn greater public confidence. In any case, it should not be in doubt whatsoever that addressing the needs of victims and survivors is some sort of shorthand for suggesting there is equivalence in the differing circumstances and the individual events that led to so many, so tragically, becoming victims and survivors. This must not and cannot be the case.

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"The SDLP believes that Eames/Bradley should have today made it unambiguously clear that those who know the most and did the worst over the years of conflict in state organizations and illegal groups have the primary responsibility for truth and justice. At the presentation of their proposals, Eames/Bradley challenged those from the democratic tradition to face up to responsibilities for the past. The SDLP agree but it was unbalanced that the responsibility of elements in state organizations and across illegal groups to account for their conduct was not more directly, publicly and fully outlined. This should have happened. It is unfortunate that it was not.

"The SDLP would also wish to welcome a number of elements of Eames/Bradley and express a number of concerns:

- Ø Eames/Bradley should have been making it clear to the British Government that they should fulfil their commitment to a public inquiry into the murder of Pat Finucane. They did not.
- Ø Eames/Bradley should have affirmed inquiries into the past in the absence of a bigger, better, more effective process being agreed. This was not done.
- Ø It is not all politicians who have "perpetuated the politicization of victims" and survivors in recent days as Eames Bradley claim. There were a number who attempted to be responsible and create space for Eames/Bradley – something that was not recognized.
- Ø It is right for Eames/Bradley to state that there needs to be not only a political accommodation but a human accommodation and note the challenge faced in so doing.
- Ø Their narrative and proposals around "Remembering" are timely and should be positively considered.
- Ø Proposals for Justice and Information Recovery Process may offer some prospects, currently denied, for more truth and justice. The SDLP believe public elements around these processes are necessary for confidence to deepen.
- Ø The proposal for a Legacy Commission creates fresh opportunities but the work of a Legacy Commission and that of other agencies with responsibility for victims, community relations and society issues must be carefully defined to avoid confusion and fragmentation.

"Ultimately, truth, justice and healing will be prejudiced or stalled, if those who did the worst and know the most fail to step forward, particularly at a leadership level. To date, elements in the RUC, the British Army and the Security Services and the leadership of the IRA, UDA, UVF and other terror groups have failed to do so in any credible or complete fashion. That is why truth and justice issues still cast their long shadow on the present. Unless these groups and people account for their conduct, this shadow will stretch out into the future."

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