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BRADLEY - TIME TO END THE SUFFERING OF THE FAMILIES OF THE DISAPPEARED

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SDLP Newry and Armagh Assembly Member Dominic Bradley has called on those information on the whereabouts of the Disappeared to come forward and end the suffering of the families.

Mr Bradley said the families of the Disappeared are not asking for justice or retribution but only to bury their loved ones with dignity.

He said: “Throughout the history of the troubles many individuals have been killed and many families and communities have struggled with the aftermath. The overwhelming majority of families have had the consolation of waking and burying their dead in accordance with the rites of the faith in which they were raised.

“The families of the Disappeared who have not yet had the remains of their loved ones returned to them have not had even that possibility open to them. They have been left, in many cases for decades, asking the why and wherefore of their loved ones’ disappearance, to wonder about their fate, to arrive at their own conclusions, and to await the recovery of their remains.

“The rest of us who have experienced deep sorrow at the death of a loved one can never imagine the anguish which the families of the Disappeared have had to endure over all these years. In our own sad situations we have been enwrapped in the support and concern of our communities but in some areas the community from which people have disappeared has been silenced.

“Surely that is not too much to ask in a civilised, Christian country that people be afforded the right to bury their dead. And those who quite rightly demand justice, equality, human rights, and the truth about the past must ensure that they too afford the same rights to others who yearn for them.

“The Commission for the Disappeared has been set up for 10 years now – in that time Northern Ireland has moved on to such an extent that there can be no reason for anyone with information not to come forward. It is important that this message is conveyed as widely as possible.”

ENDS

Full text of Dominic Bradley’s speech

Thank you, Mr Speaker, for affording this House the time to debate this very important issue. I beg to move.

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There are many things which could and which many would like to say during the course of this debate today but it may be better that they remain unsaid in deference to the wishes of the families of the Disappeared. I have spoken to the families and I will be guided in what I say by their wishes and desires for this debate and I would ask other members to be also so guided.

And those wishes and desires are that the motion which is before us here today and the debate around it will focus attention on their plight and help open hearts and minds which are still be closed to their pain to divulge important information which has not yet been forthcoming which will aid the process of the recovery of their loved ones' remains.

Throughout the history of the troubles many individuals have been killed and many families and communities have struggled with the aftermath. The overwhelming majority of families have had the consolation of waking and burying their dead in accordance with the rites of the faith in which they were raised.

Those ceremonies whilst they do not wipe every tear away at least provide the possibility of closure on the grief, sorrow, and pain of the traumatic death of a loved one. The families of the Disappeared who have not yet had the remains of their loved ones returned to them have not had even that possibility open to them. They have been left, in many cases for decades, asking the why and wherefore of their loved ones' disappearance, to wonder about their fate, to arrive at their own conclusions, and to await the recovery of their remains.

The words of Seán O' Casey's famous poem 'A Rare Time for Death in Ireland', written over eighty years ago are strangely prophetic of the Disappeared. In the poem an Irish revolutionary addresses the fallen innocents,

'You will be unknown forever,
You died without a word of praise.
You will be buried without even a shadowy ceremony.
No bugle will call your name;
No gunshot will let loose brave echoes over your grave.
You will not be numbered among the accepted slain.'

The rest of us who have experienced deep sorrow at the death of a loved one can never imagine the anguish which the families of the Disappeared have had to endure over all these years. In our own sad situations we have been enwrapped in the support and concern of our communities but in some areas the community from which people have disappeared has been silenced by the old omerta – whatever you say, say nothing.

In the end it has been left to the families to speak up for their loved ones and I hope that what we have to say here today will add to their voice in the same dignified way in which they have spoken. We can but stand back in admiration at their endurance, at their patience, at their great dignity in the face of prolonged anguish.

They are not even asking, as they are entitled to do, for justice, they are not asking as they are entitled to do, for retribution; they have ask only, as they are entitled to do, that they be allowed to bury their dead with dignity.

Surely that is not too much to ask in a civilised, Christian country. And those who quite rightly demand justice, equality, human rights, and the truth about the past must ensure that they too afford the same rights to others who yearn for them.

And the families of the Disappeared would ask those in public office, including the members of this House, to assist them and to do so in a number of ways: to publicise where they can the mechanisms by which information can be given to the Commission for the Disappeared, via the confidential telephone number - and I record it and the address of the Commission in the record here today; the telephone number is 00800 55585500, the postal address ICLVR, PO Box 10827, Dublin 2, Ireland.

It will help if we reinforce in all publicity on the disappeared that any information given to the Commission for the Disappeared is privileged and can only be used for the purpose of recovering the bodies of the disappeared and cannot be passed on to any other agency or authority.

The Commission for the Disappeared has been set up for 10 years now – in that time Northern Ireland has moved on to such an extent that there can be no reason for anyone with information not to come forward. It is important that this message is conveyed as widely as possible.

The Commission have a team of forensic experts working on their behalf and this new approach/ methodology can only work with effective information. Any information no matter how small may be significant in the overall review of a case and could make the difference between finding the body or not.

The Commissioners and Forensic Team are now half way through their time table of work– if at the end of their tenure there are still bodies not recovered there is an onus on the British and Irish Governments to continue to support the Commission of the Disappeared. The families would ask those in public life to support this.

I wish to use the platform which this debate allows to appeal to anyone, including members of this House, who has influence over those who were involved in the actions which lead to the disappearances to redouble their efforts, to return to their sources and to help ensure that no effort is spared to bring closure to the families. Likewise I would ask anyone who may have information to use the mechanisms outlined earlier or any other channel with which they feel comfortable to convey that information to the Commission.

The families have waited long enough; they deserve closure. Let us, in this House do all in our power to help them.

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