



**TRUTH RECOVERY PROCESS TO ADDRESS LEGACY  
ISSUES OF THE TROUBLES**

Simon Hoare MP

Chair Northern Ireland Affairs Committee

House of Commons

London

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Dear Simon Hoare,

The current composition of your Select Committee is a microcosm of the complexity of achieving a lasting peace in Northern Ireland. At one end of the spectrum you have Gregory Campbell MP who states his “Britishness” is not up for negotiation and at the other end the Sinn Fein MPs who won’t participate in “British” government, therefore are not on your committee. Mr Campbell has on a number of occasions on ROI media eloquently asserted his Britishness, firmly ending the questioning by saying, “you don’t get it, I am not Northern Irish, I am British”. Sinn Fein representatives state that they are Irish and not Northern Irish. There are politicians, perhaps on your committee, and many residents of Northern Ireland who would claim to be Northern Irish and British, British and Northern Irish, Northern Irish and Irish, Irish and Northern Irish. Whilst these issues of identity are not a unique to these islands, there is a simple truth which pervades everything in Northern Ireland and gives the issues urgency: The Border Poll.

Whether it happens soon or several years in the future it is incumbent on us all to ensure that, whatever the outcome of the poll, the Britishness and Irishness of people living in Northern Ireland will be respected. It is an enormous task but one which will never be achieved unless the Legacy issues are dealt with.

We attach our proposal to comprehensively deal with these issues. It is 22 years since the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, 14 years since the St Andrews Agreement, 5 years since the Stormont House Agreement and 1 year since “Addressing the Legacy of Northern Ireland’s Past” was launched. Respectfully we suggest that there has been little or no progress but the expectation of a resolution remains. All of these agreements and initiatives are of common purpose when it comes to “Legacy Issues”. We quote from the executive summary of the summary of submissions to “Addressing the Legacy of Northern Ireland’s Past”, but could supply numerous, equally explicit, extracts.

“first, any way forward must seek to meet the needs of victims and survivors; second, it must promote reconciliation to enable the people of Northern Ireland to move forward and build a better future; third, the proposals must reflect broad political consensus and be balanced, fair, equitable, and crucially, proportionate; and, finally, the proposals must be consistent with the rule of law.”

AND

“As the Secretary of State has made clear, new ways to address the legacy of the past will only succeed if the institutions can command broad support and trust from the community.. This includes

victims, survivors, wider society and those former members of the security forces who served during some of the darkest days to ensure the future of Northern Ireland would only ever be determined by democracy and consent, and never by violence.”

It is impossible to read these two extracts and to review the latest proposals from the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in anyway other than negatively. The proposals do not meet the basic tenets set out by the United Kingdom in an International Treaty and subsequent Legislation etc as the way forward and would leave the vast majority of the people of Northern Ireland in a worse position.

We are a group of individuals, North and South, East and West, who believe that the Truth Recovery Process offers the best means of addressing the ongoing issues of harm, trauma, political intractability and social division left by the Troubles. This is particularly so for victims/survivors in Northern Ireland, but it also seeks to address the needs of all those affected, who live elsewhere on these islands. We believe that reconciliation on, and acknowledgement of the facts is a necessary first step to genuine reconciliation between people and communities. The journalist and a leading academic in the field, Professor Jake Lynch, a member of our working group, contextualises our submission as follows:-

“Whenever an armed conflict moves into a nonviolent phase, there is always an overhang of unresolved justice issues on all sides. These cannot all have their day in court, but something must nonetheless happen to address them, to bring at least some relief and satisfaction to survivors. Hence, mechanisms of transitional justice are needed, with the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission often held up as a successful example. This proposal draws on the lessons of the TRC to envision an equivalent process for all on the island of Ireland. I hope it will influence the thinking of those in positions of responsibility as a whole society moves on from the traumas of the past”.

We acknowledge the differing priorities of the various groups and sections involved but we also realise that without leadership from the UK and Irish Governments, and politicians in the middle ground, the legacy issue will remain intractable. Victims in places as diverse as Belfast, Dublin, Birmingham, London, Warrenpoint and Warrington deserve closure. We believe that there must be no hierarchy of victimhood and no fear of the truth in our efforts to assist them in achieving it.

Yours sincerely

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On Behalf of Truth Recovery Process Working Group

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