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Last Updated: 09/08/2007 15:19

Hamill hearings to proceed after legal issue resolved

A public inquiry into the death of Robert Hamill today got the go-ahead.

Mr Hamill was beaten to death by loyalists, allegedly in sight of the police.

Police witnesses had said their lives would be under threat if they gave evidence to the tribunal into the killing of the 25-year-old who, was attacked by a mob in the centre of his home town, Portadown, in May 1997.

The inquiry had been delayed by a bid by retired officers who wished to give evidence without being identified, but it emerged today that the last outstanding issue had been resolved out of court.

Recent press coverage has suggested that there may be a delay in the inquiry hearings as a result of further litigation on the issue of anonymity. All parties are now pleased that this possibility has been removed and the oral hearings can progress at the earliest opportunity.

A spokesman for the inquiry

A tribunal spokesman said: "Recent press coverage has suggested that there may be a delay in the inquiry hearings as a result of further litigation on the issue of anonymity.

"All parties are now pleased that this possibility has been removed, and the oral hearings can progress at the earliest opportunity."

Twenty retired Royal Ulster Constabulary officers fought a decision by inquiry chairman Sir Edwin Jowitt's team to refuse them anonymity. Earlier this month, the House of Lords ruled in favour of the tribunal, saying it had used the correct test in judging whether officers were put at increased risk.

Lord Carswell and the rest of the Law Lords sent the separate legal dispute about whether the panel's decision was reasonable back to the High Court in Belfast. But that matter has now been resolved.

The public inquiry was established to decide whether police committed any wrongful act or omission. RUC members have denied witness claims that four officers in a vehicle saw what happened and failed to act.

Hearings have been delayed for almost a year while the legal tussle over identification continued.

The independent inquiry was recommended by Canadian ex-judge Peter Cory to examine alleged security force collusion north and south of the Irish Border.

The inquiry panel was set up in December 2004, and members were originally scheduled to begin hearing evidence last September.

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TODAY



13-18 °C

Weather Ireland

TOMORROW



13-20 °C

SUNDAY



12-19 °C

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