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Tuesday, November 11, 2008

No amnesty for crimes linked to Troubles

PEOPLE GUILTY of crimes linked to the Troubles will not be handed an automatic amnesty in any reconciliation process, the Eames-Bradley group - which is dealing with the legacy of violence - said yesterday.

Denis Bradley, who chairs the Consultative Group on the Past with Lord Eames, warned however that Northern Ireland society must face up to its history if it is to move on.

He said his group would publish its proposals on dealing with the legacy of the Troubles early in the new year, but he warned that everyone must help heal the wounds of what remained a sectarian society.

It has been claimed the group's recommendations will include a five-year commission offering bereaved relatives the option of pursuing convictions in outstanding cases, or seeking information on how their loved one died.

Mr Bradley said the speculation was unhelpful and covered only one aspect of his group's work.

"People have said to us, why not just stop everything that is going on, characterised in the phrase 'draw a line in the sand'," he said.

"I'm not sure they understand the magnitude of that statement.

"Does this mean no more prosecutions? Well that would mean introducing a general amnesty. Let me state in the clearest terms possible . . . there will be no amnesty recommended in our report."

Mr Bradley added: "Some people want the prosecution route to remain open even if the chances of further prosecutions succeeding are much reduced.

"Equally many families want to get as much information as possible, on the circumstances of the death of their loved one, then they should be given that choice.

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"Getting justice and finding the truth are going to be tremendously difficult."

It has been speculated a commission would have contacts with all groups involved in the conflict, including paramilitaries, who would provide information on cases, but without the risk of it being used as evidence.

Mr Bradley accepted that critics had claimed too much money had already been spent on dealing with old cases, but called on people to take the long view.

He was addressing a conference on dealing with the legacy of the Troubles held at Queen's University Belfast. - (PA)

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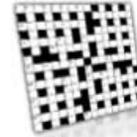
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