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Last Updated: Sunday, January 25, 2009, 12:54

Troubles victims 'seeking truth, not money'

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Controversial proposals to pay compensation to all victims of the Northern Ireland conflict are a distraction, a nationalist victims' campaigner said today.

Families are demanding the truth about disputed killings in which the state may have been involved and talk of money is demeaning, Paul O'Connor from the Pat Finucane Centre added.

Relatives of paramilitary victims, members of the security forces and civilians who were killed would all be entitled to £12,000 under a proposal by the Eames-Bradley Consultative Group on the Past. It suggested the payment be made to the next-of-kin of all victims, even if those killed were involved in paramilitary shootings and bombings

The Consultative Group is an independent panel set up to deal with the legacy of Northern Ireland's troubles, during which more than 3,700 people died.

The body chaired by former Church of Ireland primate Lord Robin Eames and former policing board vice-chairman Denis Bradley is to recommend the idea this week amid criticism from unionist leaders and some victims' groups.

Mr O'Connor said: "For us the important thing is the truth recovery, it isn't about a one-off payment, it is a horrible discussion, it is just about money."

Former first minister Lord David Trimble and current First Minister Peter Robinson have said there would be a lot of anger at equating innocent victims with those who perpetrated atrocities.

Widows of policemen killed have expressed hurt and Victims Commissioner Mike Nesbitt, whose role is to advocate their interests, also questioned the idea of a payment.

The compensation package is part of a blueprint due to be unveiled next week aimed at promoting peace and reconciliation, which will cost £300 million (€19 million) and is to be financed by the British and Irish governments.

The Consultative Group is also expected to recommend the creation of a five-year legacy commission, appointed by the British and Irish governments, to deal with the past - and to say there should be no further public inquiries.

Under the Eames-Bradley plan, all current inquiries will be concluded, and there will be no future inquiries. This, if accepted by the British and Irish governments, would undermine the campaign by the Omagh families for a cross-Border tribunal of inquiry into the 1998 Real IRA bombing.

Michael Gallagher of the Omagh Support and Self-Help Group said he was dismayed by the suggestion that there would be no further public inquiries, as he believed such an inquiry represented the only means to establish all the circumstances surrounding the Omagh bomb.

Victims' group FAIR spokesman Willie Frazer said the report was aimed at "sanctioning the work of terrorists" and "rewriting history".

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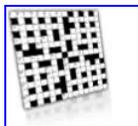
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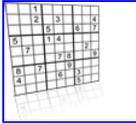
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