

The Victims and Survivors Forum

Dealing With the Past Working Group

Advice Paper to the Commission on Dealing with the Past

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Contents	Page
Summary	3
Recommendations	6
Introduction	8
Background	10
Discussion	12
Conclusion	22

DEALING WITH THE PAST – ADVICE FOR THE COMMISSIONER

Summary

1. This advice reflects the agreements and disagreements among the membership of The Victims and Survivors Forum (hereafter The Forum) on the outstanding matters relating to the past. All of our advice is directed towards one core principle - *that it should never happen again*. The manner in which this advice is set out has been carefully considered so that relationships can be built from what we hold in common. We believe that these relationships will sustain us toward the focus *that it should never happen again*, particularly when we face contentious and divisive issues. In considering these recommendations The Forum have, as far as possible, worked to reach consensus. In a few cases that was not possible with a majority of The Forum agreeing the recommendation. We have indicated where this is the case.

Introduction

2. Northern Ireland exists within a broad international context, built on commitments to basic human rights. International experience regarding societies emerging from conflict provide models and insights for dealing with the past but these must be held together with the particular context of a Northern Ireland, Ireland and Great Britain after the troubles. Whatever processes are agreed for dealing with the past the ongoing experience of victims and survivors should not be forgotten and strong political leadership is required in order that emotive matters can be resolved. As a Forum we make our recommendations as victims and survivors. A process for dealing with the past should, we believe, respond to our expressed needs. But we also believe that a wider discussion is required across society, led by politicians who take into consideration the discussions that are persisting at grassroots level.

Background

3. Issues related to the task of addressing Northern Ireland's troubled past are both emotive and challenging. In order to direct us in our work we agreed an outcome to which we are all committed - *that it should never happen again*.¹ The Forum accepts that achieving the ambition *that it should never happen again* will require a cost from us all. Nevertheless we are convinced that the time is right for measures to be put in place to address the outstanding issues. These measures have to be agreed in response to the particular context of the conflict in and about Northern Ireland. Strong leadership will be required to address the outstanding issues. It is our view that we will be better enabled, as victims and survivors, to contribute to the health of society when steps are in place to achieve the ambition *that it should never happen again*.

Moving forward and dealing with the past

4. There are matters about which The Forum is agreed. We are agreed that a line should not be drawn under the past and that a process for dealing with the past should be considered and constructed. As victims and survivors our experiences influence what is important in any process and we are convinced that strong political leadership is required to put the process in place. If a line is drawn under the past either overtly or by default then victims and survivors will be removed to the edge of society rather than being enabled to contribute to a healthy society directed towards a new and more hopeful future. The existing disparate processes for dealing with the past are insufficient. A composite and focused process is required, taking as its starting point a recognition, from all involved in violence and from all who created and sustained the conditions for violence, that they killed and maimed. We provide a set of values which we believe are essential to underpin a composite process and we advise that these values should be adopted by political leaders who would also consider how the values can be adopted across society. The purpose of resisting 'drawing a line' is for society to move towards the aspiration *that it should never happen again* in a way which enables future generations to

¹ In binding ourselves to the ambition that it should never happen again we are emphasizing that the focus of dealing with the past should be the future - our children and our grandchildren, the generations to come whom we do not want to suffer as we have suffered. We are committed to our suffering and loss as a source of energy for a better, more reconciled and peaceful future.

move closer to that ambition rather than back into the past. In other words, each generation should be enabled to move into a new future because of the steps taken by the previous generation. The goal is towards a peaceful and shared future in which the mistakes of the past are resisted.

5. Recognition and acknowledgement of the experiences both ongoing and in the past, of victims and survivors is crucial for moving forward. We set out a significant number of areas on which we are agreed and which we consider to be important for the required recognition and acknowledgement. We make specific recommendations regarding storytelling and reparations for victims and survivors.

The present context

6. Northern Ireland remains a contested society. In this section we address matters that remain contested: the definition of a victim; methods of achieving truth; the pursuit of justice and an agreed composite and un-adjudicated narrative of the past. Regarding the definition of a victim, we recognise that there is contention and disagreement. On the issues of truth, justice and an agreed narrative we will focus future advice on the construction of a process for dealing with the past. This will include what is meant by truth, what truths can be provided to victims and survivors, a context for disclosure, justice arrangements including transitional justice and a composite narrative of the past. It is important that, in the first instance, we set out those areas on which we are agreed. From our diverse backgrounds and experiences we have been able to draw together common strands of thought with the certainty that we can move forward. If we, from our diverse backgrounds and carrying our experience of being victims and survivors, can reach a common mind we believe that others will be able to also.

Recommendations

- 1. We recommend that a process to deal with the past should be directed towards the aspiration that it should never happen again.***
- 2. We recommend that victims and survivors play a vital role with others in developing a process for dealing with the past given the experience of trauma and its impacts that a process must be designed to resist ever happening again.***
- 3. We recommend that political leaders should adopt these values as a starting point in their conversations about how to deal with the past and that consideration be given to how these values can be adopted across society and that individuals be enabled to make the choice for these values so that they can bend their efforts towards a better, shared and more peaceful future.***
- 4. We recommend that in considering, or failing to consider, a process for dealing with the past civic and public leaders give consideration to the impact on victims and survivors.***
- 5. We recommend that speaking about 'drawing a line under the past' should be replaced by an open commitment and active willingness to seek out ways to deal with the past both in the short term and in the longer term.***
- 6. We recommend that consideration be given to establishing a process to serve both truth and justice and to draw together existing processes. All parties involved in acts of violence and in creating and sustaining the conditions for acts of violence should be asked to acknowledge a commitment to a shared and better future built on the values set out in paragraphs 21-23.***
- 7. We recommend that the important issue of recognition for victims and survivors be given consideration by political leaders, taking into account that recognition***

means different things to different people including hearing individual stories met with generous listening.

8. We recommend that the needs of victims and survivors be fully addressed as a significant aspect of the mechanisms for recognition.

9. We recommend that stories already recorded should be collected from existing projects and become part of a newly designed story telling project, part of a newly designed process to contribute to a composite narrative of the past.

Introduction

The International Context

7. The Belfast Good Friday Agreement (1998)² was an International Agreement. As a negotiated political settlement the Belfast Good Friday Agreement sought to facilitate a resolution to the protracted political and historical conflict in Ireland, the UK and the European Union. It was supported by 71% of those voting in the referendum in Northern Ireland on 22 May 1998.

8. The scale of the political conflict, from 1966-1998, is such that over 3,700 people were killed and 40,000 injured.³ The Agreement made the link of ending conflict and violence with a new political beginning. The parties to the Agreement declared: *“The tragedies of the past have left a deep and profoundly regrettable legacy of suffering. We must never forget those who have died or been injured, and their families. But we can best honour them through a fresh start, in which we firmly dedicate ourselves to the achievement of reconciliation, tolerance, and mutual trust, and to the protection and vindication of the human rights of all.”*⁴

9. As victims and survivors our considerations are set within the context of international law and decision-making in which central place is given to addressing the needs of victims and survivors. Internationally and legally the right to remedy, reparations and the truth are crucial. The pursuit of these outcomes has, in some cases, led to truth recovery processes committed to varying degrees of justice in the narrow and traditional sense. The processes have at times been assisted by the introduction of amnesty or immunity arrangements. We are committed to upholding international standards within our own particular context. We are looking for a set of arrangements that will direct society towards a situation in which what happened will never happen again.

² *Agreement Reached in the Multi-Party Negotiations*, 10 April 1998. Hereafter referred to as the Good Friday Agreement accessible for reference at: <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/peace/docs/agreement.htm>

³ For an index of the deceased see Malcolm Sutton, *An Index of Deaths from the Conflict in Ireland 1969-1993* accessible at: <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/sutton/>

⁴ Declaration of Support, Point 2, The Good Friday Agreement (1998).

10. In local contexts the international ambition for truth has to be taken into consideration but not to the extent that a false reconciliation is imposed locally. In all cases where truth-recovery mechanisms have been introduced arrangements have been made which are pertinent to the particular context. Arrangements may follow transitional justice mechanisms. However, even transitional justice remains contested as some believe that it is nothing short of sacrificing justice altogether. Careful thought needs, then, to be given to the nature of contextual mechanisms, how they will impact different communities, groups and individuals. What can be achieved and at what cost is an important aspect of any consideration of what can or should be done. We emphasize that local arrangements should take account of whether or not they will make for better relationships out of which understanding of difference and a shared and more reconciled future may be built.
11. Whatever is done locally to deal with the past must be committed to truth that, together with peace and at least an agreed form of justice, can lead to reconciliation. Truth is essential to rebuilding the future of Northern Ireland. Given that there have been more than thirty Truth Commissions across the world since 1973 there is clearly a growing International understanding of and commitment to the importance of establishing truth. The purpose of any Truth Commission, or whatever contextually situated process is agreed, is preventing what happened in the past from happening again. How truth may be understood, as well as how it can be achieved, is work that we intend to give consideration to in the next year.
12. At this point we are strongly of the view that the many narratives about the past can be gathered into a composite and un-adjudicated narrative which will enable the many different voices to be heard. This will contribute to understanding and may be viewed as an effective local approach to beginning a new approach to dealing with a past that continues to disquiet.

Background

'It should never happen again'

13. In preparation for giving this advice members of the working group read the extensive material available on how to deal with the past. The working group consulted with academics and individuals within the group held conversations with many interested people who have been developing their thinking since the signing of the Belfast Good Friday Agreement. The working group also organised a meeting for The Forum with the Attorney General and discussed questions pertinent to areas of truth and justice.

14. Both the working group and The Forum came to the task aware that many aspects of the debate are emotive and contentious. From the beginning, therefore, the group set out a commitment and a purpose for the task. This was not difficult given that, as victims and survivors, we have a shared experience of suffering and loss and a respect for one another and for our individual experiences. The experience inflicted upon us leads us to the shared conviction that *'it should never happen again'*. Later in this paper (paragraph 21-23) we set out values which, if adopted, would provide a basis from which behaviour and vision for a future which resists the past happening again. Such values adopted across public life, taken into policy-making, and adopted at every level of society, will contribute to a secure democracy for future generations.

We recommend that a process to deal with the past should be directed towards the aspiration that it should never happen again.

15. Among victims and survivors many feel isolated, forgotten and left behind while others are perceived to have 'moved on'. The realities of injury, ongoing health challenges and the intrusion of disturbing memories mean that for many the present is defined or dominated by their past experience. What happened in the past can

be real today. There is an inevitable tension between the individual story⁵ and experience and the need of a society to reconstruct itself towards a settled peace. As victims and survivors we want to play an active role in society, bringing our experiences into the public domain in ways which assist the construction of a firmly rooted democracy focused on a future in which the things of the past, the differences and divisions, do not result in the kind of violence which has left us with daily suffering, many unanswered questions and hopes of a better future so fragile that we dare not believe it to be possible for ourselves. So in all that we say we direct our readers to our conviction and direction of thought – that what happened in the past should never happen again.

We recommend that victims and survivors play a vital role with others in developing a process for dealing with the past given the experience of trauma and its impacts that a process must be designed to resist ever happening again.

16. Measures will have to be taken for our hope to become reality. Some of those measures will have to happen incrementally given that there is not yet broad agreement on what needs to be done. What can be done must be done. What is not yet agreed requires a longer-term strategy. Having lived as we have lived we know without a shadow of doubt that if the past is not addressed, if the outstanding issues are not confronted and if the causes of what happened are not removed, at both rational and emotional levels, then the hope of a society in which ‘it never happens again’ can only be disappointed.

17. We accept that the ambition *that it should never happen again* comes at a price worth paying for the sake of a shared and peaceful future. Those who seek an international commission may have to accept the integrity of national representatives. Equally, those who resist an international dimension may have to

⁵ Individual stories of experiences relating to death, injury and ongoing trauma need to be accommodated. These stories are many and various. If any are excluded then there will be victims and survivors who have been dismissed from society in a manner which is both untimely and without compassion. We believe it is possible to allow individual stories to be held together in the movement of a society to a new and better place. We further believe that individual stories contribute to sustaining a commitment towards action and decision-making so that *it should never happen again*.

accept that it may be the only way to put a process in place to which representatives from across the community can become a part.

18. We acknowledge that how we deal with the past is a matter of dispute given the many narratives of the past. In particular, the language used in discussion has the potential to further divide or to unite around an agreed process. Evidence needs to be seen of attempts to develop language to interpret one another's understandings and to bring healing and hope.

19. In order to deal with the past, clear and strong civic and political leadership is needed. We are interested to know how political parties are going to lead on this issue and we want to be assured that there is a commitment to dealing with the past. At community level and among NGOs there is considerable discussion about how the past can be dealt with. This ongoing conversation can provide a model upwards through society to assist in understanding where effective leadership can be given and advantage should be taken to involve those who are familiar with the challenges and opportunities.

Discussion

The present contested context

20. Across society there are differences of opinion as to what needs to be done with regard to the past. It is our intention to make these areas the basis of our work into the next year and already we can identify some emerging agreements. In particular, we will focus on matters related to truth and justice. As a group of individuals from diverse backgrounds we have developed a set of values to underpin our work in considering how to deal with the past. In our discussion we set out those values together with areas on which we are agreed. We also discuss those areas on which we have not reached agreement, setting out the matters that remain unresolved and provide a framework for our future work.

Values underpinning the conversation about the past

21. The Forum has agreed a set of values to underpin new processes to deal with the outstanding issues from the past. It is our belief that these values, if applied, can assist in designing a process that will deliver to some of the needs of victims and will direct towards a society in which what happened in the past will not happen again. These values sit under our commitment *that it should never happen again*.

22. These values should be considered and adopted by our political leaders and consideration should then be given as to how these can be owned and applied across society.

23. The values we have agreed are:

- Violence is futile;
- The rule of law is to be respected as a basis for moving forward;
- Generosity is called for, to each other in the victims and survivors sector and across society;
- Victims and survivors should be considered part of the whole community and integrated into it rather than tolerated or marginalized;
- Individual, local and sectional experiences of victims should be respected;
- Strong political leadership and decision making should be paramount in the interests of democracy;
- The outstanding issues with regard to the past must be addressed;
- All parties, both public and individual, engaged in developing a better future should come to their task with humility, respect for the dignity of others, tolerance and a desire to make and embed peace.

We recommend that political leaders should adopt these values as a starting point in their conversations about how to deal with the past and that consideration be given to how these values can be adopted across society

and that individuals be enabled to make the choice for these values so that they can bend their efforts towards a better, shared and more peaceful future.

We recommend that in considering, or failing to consider, a process for dealing with the past civic and public leaders give consideration to the impact on victims and survivors.

Moving forward and dealing with the past

24. Over the months of discussion some areas of agreement have been identified and the Forum believes that action should be taken. These areas are with regard to the flawed notion of drawing a line under the past, the need for a process to deal with the past and values that should underpin such a process. There are also some on how the experiences of victims can be recognised and acknowledged.

No drawing a line under the past

25. Some argue that the only way to deal with our troubled past is to draw a line under it and move on. The Forum recognises the natural and understandable desire of many within our society to draw a line under the past but we are concerned that for some “drawing a line under the past” is a coded description for a process in which victims are expected or even pressured to become and to remain silent about their suffering, their concerns and the injustices visited upon them. We cannot accept the validity of any such process. Drawing a line under the past will only result in the silencing or marginalizing of victims and survivors who must be facilitated to articulate their experiences in a way which provides a resource into future generations to resist what happened ever happening again.

26. It is not possible for victims and survivors to draw a line under the past given our ongoing experience - memories of our loved ones, physical and mental scars left by our experiences, loss of hope and the ongoing experience of trauma. Some of us speak of our political losses and others of our political gains. Some of us have more hope than others but all of us share the belief that if a line is drawn under the past then we, as victims and survivors, are displaced and dismissed from society.

27. Drawing a line under the past provides the ultimate in amnesty arrangements without truth or justice for victims and survivors.

28. It is important to us that our experience is not repeated in future generations. We therefore believe that what can be done must be done so that future generations can do more with regard to dealing with the past once and for all. If that which can be done is left undone then the possibility of history repeating itself will be more likely. This includes developing understanding of how peace is promoted and a future built on the foundations of good relationships and a commitment to peace.⁶

We recommend that speaking about 'drawing a line under the past' should be replaced by an open commitment and active willingness to seek out ways to deal with the past both in the short term and in the longer term.

The need for a process

29. The Forum acknowledges existing processes that are in place to address outstanding issues from the past – HET, OPONI, Inquests and Inquiries, amongst others. While there is value to victims from these processes we emphasize the limited nature of these processes. These processes are disconnected, dissatisfying and often leave victims feeling unacknowledged and their suffering unrecognized.

30. Thought needs to be given to existing processes so that a more effective process for dealing with issues from the past can be established and which will deliver to victims the truth they deserve.

31. Victims should be at the core of such a process together with a commitment to developing relationships across society so that there will be no new community of victims in the future.

32. It is essential that political nettles are grasped by British, Irish and local political parties. If present processes are allowed to continue as they are they will result in a disconnection between society and victims. Present processes have, therefore, the

⁶ George Santayana, in his Reason in Common Sense, The Life of Reason, Vol.1, wrote "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

potential to become more toxic and divisive. It is in the interests of victims and survivors that a narrow legalism is resisted and a new process found to allow a fully functioning democracy, in which everyone can trust, to emerge.

33. Some would go so far as to say that the present systems reward violence rather than respond to victims and, therefore, we are agreed that any process should engage all who were part of the violence, killing, strategizing to kill and participation in the systems and institutions of society which led to a collapse of the rule of law.

34. We believe that political stability, which is of the utmost importance in building toward a peaceful and shared future, must acknowledge the needs and interests of victims and survivors.

35. Lundy & McGovern's research provides insight into what arrangements for dealing with the past will be accepted across Northern Ireland. For example, the majority is more likely to trust international facilitators. The Forum is agreed that these statistics should be given careful consideration in order that no line is drawn under the past.⁷

36. Processes for the resolution of the past have to be transparent and professional, adhere to international standards and hold all members of the community accountable.

37. We address values essential to underpin any process in paragraphs 21-23. These values could be expressed in a public statement as a means of committing all members of society, or as many as can, to a shared future. A covenant to victims and survivors that every effort will be made for the past not to repeat itself could also provide a way in which a common commitment to a better future is made publicly. Or some other means may be found that allows for public accountability for the future to be expressed by recognition of the mistakes, horrors and suffering caused in the past.

We recommend that consideration be given to establishing a process to serve both truth and justice and to draw together existing processes. All parties

⁷ Patricia Lundy & Mark McGovern *Attitudes Towards a Truth Commission in Northern Ireland*, 2007

involved in acts of violence and in creating and sustaining the conditions for acts of violence should be asked to acknowledge a commitment to a shared and better future built on the values set out in paragraph 21-23.

(Agreed by the large majority of The Forum)

Recognition & Acknowledgement

38. We are agreed that recognition should be given to victims in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland and also to those who have come from further afield. Some visitors from other countries lost their lives and were injured. Some of those killed or injured as a result of the conflict in and about Northern Ireland were based in or living in other countries. Others have moved out of the country. All should be recognised as victims and survivors of the troubled years.

39. Recognition means different things to different people. There is always a human cost to violence and a legacy that follows loss. How the human cost can be recognised merits more thought and we are agreed that political leaders should address themselves to this matter, for example through the Maze/Long Kesh Project.

40. We are agreed that history should be taught in a way which includes different perspectives and political viewpoints and which attends to the futility of violence.

41. We are agreed that story telling is an important aspect of recognition and that it has therapeutic and trauma relieving outcomes.

42. We further believe that story-telling bears witness to the futility of violence.

43. As a project and experience story telling needs to develop to include generosity in listening. Without this generosity there is a likelihood that some victims will feel further isolated, dismissed and victimized. Remembering should always be of lives taken, lives broken, lives continuing with injury and lives changed forever.

44. We are aware that there are many story telling projects underway and we believe that a collection of these projects should be made. The challenge of bringing together different types of project can be met and makes an important contribution to a shared narrative of what happened.

45. It is important to note the contentious matter of means testing of victims and survivors in order that their ongoing needs, including mental health and emotional needs, can be met. We affirm that responding to the ongoing needs of victims and survivors is a matter of reparation and, therefore, any assessments should be made on the basis of needs.

We recommend that the important issue of recognition for victims and survivors be given consideration by political leaders, taking into account that recognition means different things to different people including hearing individual stories met with generous listening.

We recommend that the needs of victims and survivors be fully addressed as a significant aspect of the mechanisms for recognition.

Focus for future work

46. Our discussions have revealed some areas about which we have not yet reached agreement. Given the extent of the issues raised within each of these areas we have not yet been able to give full consideration to these matters and will give time to them in the coming months.

47. Time and again victims and survivors have expressed to us a concern that their experience is overlooked and their stories unheard. For some that belief arises from the unfinished business of inquests while for others it arises from a view that those who were, in the past, involved in acts of violence have been embraced by society while victims and survivors are still fighting for effective services and for the opportunity to tell others about their experience. At times the difficulty is attributed to the definition of a victim. At other times this is attributed to an inflexible system of governance and justice. Truth processes are considered by some to provide some resolution to the difficulties while for others truth processes are a way of redefining

what happened in the past. Behind all of these differences lies the reality of multiple narratives of the past. Each of these areas provides the focus of our work in the coming months.

Who is a victim?

48. For some the present definition of a victim establishes innocence and guilt in a way that they find difficult to accept. For others tampering with the definition leads to establishing the 'deserving' and the 'undeserving' in a way which would mean the downfall and loss of all that we have achieved since the signing of the Belfast Good Friday Agreement.
49. We emphasize the importance of seeking consensus on the definition and are very aware how difficult consensus is to achieve. Strong leadership will be required given the potential for political disarray. The debate may be assisted by all who killed or maimed making recognition of what they did and the impacts for victims and survivors. The human experience of loss can be agreed and we can recognise that in one another despite the different understandings of the past that we hold. The experience of loss is no respecter of politics, religion or class. There is a shared experience of loss across all divides, whether a loss of life, opportunity, hope or in some other way. In this sense there is a common understanding of what it means to be a victim or a survivor.
50. The debate will be further assisted by the provision of effective and accessible services to redress what some see as an imbalance across society.
51. Some hold the view that, at the very least, the First and Deputy First Ministers should hold a discussion about the definition either to open a debate or to finally establish the impossibility of any redefinition.

52. Other definitions of a victim may be considered e.g. EU definition⁸. But even the EU definition is problematic in that victimhood is measured by the laws of the State. If these laws are contested then the definition is contested.

53. We are conscious of the difficulties that will present if the debate about how victims are defined is opened up. We would prefer that our concerns are addressed by effective services which are accessible and by the provision of a productive process to deal with the past. We do not believe that everything can be done in this generation but we strongly believe that what we do in our time and generation should enable future generations to do more so *that it should never happen again*.

54. Without the matter of definition being finally addressed then all matters contingent on the different views of what a victim is or is not will stand or fall.

The pursuit of justice

55. The existing system of justice does not satisfy everyone. Some seek freedom of access to information during review processes, free from political and religious interference. Some seek a resolution of situations in which prosecutions were never brought. Others believe that focused consideration should be given to what is meant by 'justice', what it is hoped to achieve through processes of justice and what transitional justice can offer.

56. All are agreed that when expectations are set too high disappointment will follow.

57. Given the broad disagreement on how justice is pursued and what can be achieved, it is our intention to provide advice in the future.

58. Justice arrangements in regard to how the past is dealt with should, in our view, be applied across the board.

⁸ The European Framework Decision (2001/220/JHA). On the standing of victims, adopted on 15 March 2001, defined a victim as follows: 'victim' shall mean "**a natural person who has suffered harm, including physical or mental injury, emotional suffering or economic loss, directly caused by acts or omissions that are in violation of the criminal law of a Member State.**"

Methods of achieving truth

59. The purpose of truth telling has to be focused on the overall outcome of a process aimed at ensuring that what happened in the past will never happen again. Members of The Forum are agreed that the best way for truth to be disclosed is by those who know the truth.
60. Truth telling is in everyone's interests, including wider society and the health of that society.
61. Differing views are held across the sector as to who and how truth can be disclosed; some seek full disclosure, others a narrative of what happened without names, details etc.
62. It is our intention to review literature and to consider the issues raised in discussion with informed individuals and groups to see if it is possible to reach agreement about what truth can be achieved and how it can be achieved. The debate will include an awareness of an effective amnesty being offered in 1968, of the arrangements for disclosure of information regarding the disappeared, of immunity arrangements during the Saville Inquiry and more recently, and in another context, of the Leveson Inquirers adopting a 'self-denying ordinance' with regard to the potential before them of pursuing investigations.⁹
63. Other means of achieving the 'truth' may be sought. In some cases victims are not satisfied with the existing justice system and the measure of truth that it offers. They prefer to consider an alternative process to access truth. But others cannot settle on the morality of any kind of immunity or amnesty arrangements. We will provide advice on these matters in the future.
64. Future advice will include what is meant by truth. Truth can be understood in a variety of ways, for example information, prosecution, narrative etc. and we will need to consider what we mean by truth and what different forms of truth can be

⁹ By this was meant a commitment not prejudice investigations with any information that came before the Inquirers thus providing a freedom for information to be given to the Leveson Inquiry.

expected to deliver to victims and survivors. Consideration needs to be given to how best to achieve the truths that are sought.

A narrative of the past

65. Behind the dilemmas in reaching agreement that present themselves is an ongoing difficulty in developing a composite or accepted understanding of what happened in the past. How each defines the past shapes how going forward is conceived. The conflicts we continue to experience arise, in large part, from our separate and dividing narratives of the past and, consequently, those narratives need to be given attention.

66. We are agreed that a narrative needs to be constructed and that a collection of existing narratives should be made out of which, with additional material, the contours of a narrative can be constructed, without conflicting narratives being adjudicated. This will inform the process of moving into a future in which the past will not repeat itself.

67. We have addressed stories and storytelling in paragraphs 38-45.

We recommend that stories already recorded should be collected from existing projects and become part of a newly designed story telling project to contribute towards a composite narrative of the past.

(Agreed by the large majority of The Forum)

Conclusion

68. As victims and survivors we are aware more than most how emotive, challenging and unresolved Northern Ireland's troubled past remains. The many areas of contention should not be permitted to persist as opportunities to extend the conflict and create more victims or permit avenues into a repetition of our conflicts of the past. We have approached our task with a sense of urgency and believe that there is no alternative but strong and urgent leadership across society in order that

movement towards a better future can be made. The urgency consists in the core focus agreed for our task - *that it should never happen again*.