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24 June 2020

Dear Political Representative

**Open Letter to Westminster Political Representatives following evidence to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee on 24<sup>th</sup> June 2020**

Today this Commission gave evidence to the Westminster Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, which is investigating the implications of the proposed Legacy Legislation on the Victims and Survivors of the longest civil conflict this country has experienced in modern times.

Members were directly addressed by two members of the Victims and Survivors Forum; Mary Moreland and Emmett McConomy. The Victims and Survivors Forum is a group of inspirational volunteers who have experienced harm as a consequence of the Troubles. They are the only body founded in statute to represent the voice of victims and survivors of the Conflict, and are the primary source of advice to the Commission.

When Mary saw two police officers arrive at her place of work in December 1988 she immediately knew that it could only mean something terrible had happened. She heard the news she had long dreaded; her husband, a soldier like herself, had been shot dead by the IRA.

On 16th April 1982, Emmett's 11-year old brother Stephen McConomy was shot by a British Army soldier with a plastic bullet in the back of the head. Stephen died three days later, leaving his mother, two younger brothers and wider family circle broken-hearted.

Emmett and Mary, as members of the Victims and Survivors Forum, work together to represent those people from around the whole of the United Kingdom and beyond who have suffered bereavement, physical and psychological injury as a consequence of the Troubles, and then decades of neglect. Their message to the Committee from the Victims and Survivors Forum was clear and unified; that in formulating this legislation politicians must fully engage with victims and survivors. They are the people who have real knowledge and understanding of what has gone

before, and their unifying aim is to ensure that this recurring cycle of violence never happens again. The Secretary of State's Written Ministerial Statement on March 18<sup>th</sup> proposed "significant change" from the draft legislation envisioned on the Stormont House Agreement on which victims and survivors were consulted in 2018, yet as things stand they still have no clarity about what those significant changes will be.

The critical issues for many families and communities are of access to information about the circumstances leading to the death of a loved one and acknowledgement of harm. It is evident from previous and ongoing investigations that new information and evidence can be uncovered and that families who want answers can be better served than they have been.

Access to family reports, based on evidence, is vitally important, even if the evidence is likely in most cases to be insufficient to secure a conviction. The needs of families must also be addressed in an inclusive way and this means that options open to those who live in Northern Ireland should be open to those who live in Birmingham London, Manchester and elsewhere in the UK and beyond. The Commission remains concerned that efforts to seriously look at the needs of victims and survivors outside Northern Ireland remain unaddressed.

It is also critical that we understand that Legacy cannot simply be framed around ongoing investigations or potential processes. There are a range of matters that should inform how we effectively deal with the legacy of our past. These include provision of health and welfare services and the need to support victims and survivors regardless of where they live. It is also important to highlight the ongoing delay and uncertainty in relation to the implementation of the Victims Payment Scheme for those most severely injured. The Commission would highlight the interconnected nature of truth, justice, acknowledgement, and the health and wellbeing of victims and survivors.

Most importantly of all, MP's throughout the UK also have constituents for whom the conflict in Northern Ireland has come to their door, and need to understand why the past is the present, every day, for those injured or bereaved. One person's powerful account of how they experience this is here; [please take a moment to listen.](#)

It is because families and communities continue to be impacted that this Legislation must be right, that the objective cannot be to close down investigations which families from all backgrounds need in order to acknowledge harm and to build a better and more reconciled future.

The Commission for Victims and Survivors is here to answer any of your questions and to be an independent source of information and guidance on what Victims and Survivors need.

Yours Sincerely

**Judith Thompson and the Victims and Survivor Forum**