



*The untold stories of
Relatives, Victims, and Survivors*



Head Office
39 Glen Road
Belfast
BT11 8BB

T: +44 (28) 90 627171
E: info@relativesforjustice.com
www.relativesforjustice.com

North Belfast Office
2-4 Brompton Park
Belfast
BT14 7LD

T: +44 (28) 96 949327
E: ardoyme@relativesforjustice.com
www.relativesforjustice.com

Mid-Ulster Office
42/44 Irish Street
Dungannon
BT70 1DQ

Tel: +44 (28) 8775 1697
E: dungannon@relativesforjustice.com
Twitter @RelsForJustice

June 2022

Congressional and Senatorial Briefing Paper on

**The British Government “Northern Ireland
Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Bill” May
2022**

Presented by Mr Mark Thompson, CEO,
Relatives for Justice
&
Mr Danny O’Connell, President,
Ancient Order of Hibernians

Timeline of events affecting victims and survivors since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement April 1998

Our Cherished Peace Accord

In April 1998 the **Good Friday Agreement** (GFA) heralded a new beginning, ending the decades long British-Irish conflict in which approximately 3,600 people were killed, an estimated 40-60,000 people physically and psychologically injured, approximately 30,000 imprisoned, and where the abnormal had become the normal. At that time, the population in the North of Ireland, where the majority of the conflict was experienced, was less than 1.7 million.

The Role of the US

The GFA would not have been achieved without the proactive role of the USA as an honest broker and not least through the appointment of **Senator George Mitchell by the Clinton Administration**, who chaired the talks between all the local parties and both governments. Moreover, this success was also due to a **bi-partisan, across-the-aisle, support**; an approach that has continued ever since when addressing the full implementation and realisation of all parts of the agreement.

In the context of **US foreign policy this was undoubtedly one of the finest achievements** by a US administration, including by successive administrations since who have nurtured the success achieved.

Enshrined Rights

The GFA participants pledged to end violence by all sides and address the future constitutional status of the North of Ireland through politics and exclusively peaceful means. Key provisions would end decades long injustice, inequality, and discrimination through a series of measures enabling **'...the protection and vindication of human rights of all.'**¹ Thus the incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) is the foundation on which the GFA is built and further legislation incorporates the above Convention rights into domestic law through the Human Rights Act (1998). These rights are very spine of the GFA.

The GFA is an **international peace agreement lodged with the UN²**, signed and ratified by both the **Irish and UK governments** and witnessed by the US.

Victims of Violence & Human Rights Violations

The GFA provided a framework for **families from all backgrounds, all religions and none, who were impacted by the conflict to pursue truth, justice, accountability and acknowledgement of their suffering**. This provided agency to families, and for many an ability for the very first time to seek legal remedy and redress through effective independent human rights-compliant investigations, free from fear, intimidation and reprisal. It signalled an end to impunity and where justice, interdependent, might hopefully be a key contributor to healing and an end to the perpetual cycle of trauma for thousands of victims and survivors.

Demand for Justice

In the two decades since the GFA, and using the courts, law and HRA, **over 1,100 civil cases** have been lodged by bereaved relatives and survivors relating to murder, attempted murder, kidnapping, torture, sexual violence (including rape) and disappearances in respect to all sides involved in the conflict.

The Police Ombudsman's Office for NI (PONI), established under the GFA as an independent oversight body monitoring the new police service (PSNI - also established under the agreement) with a specific retrospective remit to examine past police misconduct and criminal behaviour of the previous police force, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), **has 450 plus cases that have met the 'Grave & Exceptional Threshold' of warranting new investigations. Some of the cases involve multiple fatalities.**

¹ GFA paragraph 2 page 1

² Registered UN Treaty Series No. 1-36776

The previous Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland (LCJ), Sir Declan Morgan, put in place a five-year plan to address the backlog of **legacy inquests**, some of which relate to events as far back as the 1970's. Prior to the GFA and the HRA, inquests were perfunctory in that they had little to no powers and merely issued death certificates, and killings involving the state were more-than-often indefinitely delayed. **Through the GFA, inquests now have powers to compel witnesses, seek disclosure and discovery of documents, examine evidence, and make findings.** However, the LCJ's plan was significantly delayed by several years when funding was withheld. Victims viewed this as cynical given how the coronial system was now complying with the ECHR. Currently, there are over **30 major inquests** into some of the most controversial killings committed during the conflict with many involving multiple fatalities perpetrated by all sides awaiting hearings. Others have recently completed, for example the inquest into the Ballymurphy Massacre.

Further advances were made in 2010 with the devolution of policing and criminal justice powers to the power-sharing Executive and the creation of a Department of Justice (DoJ) and Minister, and an Attorney General (AG). On application to the AG (under Section 14 of the Coroners Act) new inquests have been directed, including that of the **Ballymurphy Massacre** in which 11 unarmed civilians, **including a mother of 8 and a parish priest**, were gunned down by British soldiers in August 1971; the same soldiers went on to carry out the atrocity known as **Bloody Sunday** where 14 unarmed civil rights protesters were gunned down in Derry in January 1972. Despite all those civilians killed in these two atrocities being labelled 'gunmen' 'gunwomen' and 'bombers' at the time of their killings, fresh inquiries and inquests have cleared their names and created an official record that the killings were **'unjustified' and 'unjustifiable'**.

Policing Response to Legacy

In 2005, the new police service (PSNI) created a special unit to examine unsolved conflict killings through the establishment of the **Historical Enquiries Team (HET)**. However, the body that reviews the work of all police forces across the UK, including in the jurisdiction of the North of Ireland, **Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabularies (HMIC)**, ruled that the **HET process was unlawful** as it had an investigative bias towards how they examined killings by the British Army with 'less rigour' than killings by other groupings and thus was disbanded in 2013³. It acted contrary to the ECHR/HRA.

The HET had been part of the UK's 'package of measures' response to their supervision by the Committee of Ministers to the Council of Europe following significant rulings by the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in a series of cases where the UK was unanimously found to have violated the **Article 2 rights** of the next of kin by failing to independently investigate a number of controversial and disputed killings by the state including killings through collusion with illegal paramilitaries. **Article 2 forms part the ECHR/HRA and is The Right To Life.** Under Art 2, States must preserve life and in circumstances where life is taken, and when it involves the state's use of lethal force, then investigations must be thoroughly independent, prompt, effective and where evidence exists of wrongdoing, the perpetrators held to account in a court of law. Crucially, families must also be adequately involved and appraised of every step. Prior to the GFA, this did not occur and a de-facto process of immunity and impunity existed for the vast majority of state killings including killings by illegal paramilitaries with whom the state colluded.

Eames/Bradley Initiative to Address the Past

In 2006, the UK government appointed a cross-community group of highly credible individuals to consult widely on, and make recommendations on, how to address the past. Known as the **Consultative Group on the Past NI (CGPNI)**, or **Eames/Bradley**, the surnames of the two Co-Chairs, **Lord Robin Eames**, former Anglican archbishop of Armagh, and primate of all-Ireland for the Protestant Church of Ireland and **Denis Bradley**, a former Catholic priest, community activist, and peace advocate who was present on Bloody Sunday and was the Vice-Chair of the first Policing Board for the new PSNI post the GFA.

³ <https://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmicfrs/media/inspection-of-the-police-service-of-northern-ireland-historical-enquiries-team-20130703.pdf>

In 2009, the group published their findings after the most inclusive and extensive consultation process ever undertaken about how we address the legacy of the past and build for the future. Amongst their key recommendations was the establishment of an independent human rights Article 2-compliant investigative body with full police powers to examine all unsolved killings.⁴ **The UK government refused to implement the recommendations.**

US Assistance

In 2013, former **US Senator Richard Haass and Harvard Professor Megan O'Sullivan** were invited by the devolved Executive to consult with the political parties and wider society on a range of issues including how to address the past. Known as the **Panel of Parties**, they presented a much similar set of proposals to those the CGPNI⁵. However, the joint partner of Sinn Féin in The Executive Office (TEO), the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), rejected the proposals. Importantly, both governments were not involved in the process.

Finally an Agreed Way Forward

In December 2014, both governments and all the political parties reached agreement at Stormont House. Known as the **Stormont House Agreement (SHA)**, this too set out proposals to address the past, stop the piecemeal approach and finally house all the outstanding legacy issues within the civil courts, investigations by the Police Ombudsman, and PSNI, into a bespoke set of proposals that included a new **Historical Investigations Unit (HIU)** that was Article 2-compliant, in accordance with the GFA.

British Government Bad Faith

No sooner was the ink dry on the agreement, the UK government unilaterally inserted a series of clauses under the guise of '**national security**' that would, in hundreds of cases, prevent any disclosure of documents. This was described by the then **Irish government minister Charlie Flanagan as a 'smothering blanket' to conceal information**⁶.

In November 2015, there was a further commitment by the British government to implement the SHA within 100 days of the **Fresh Start talks** involving both governments and the parties. However, this commitment was also broken.

PSNI's LIB

In 2015, the PSNI set up its **Legacy Investigations Branch (LIB)** with an outstanding caseload of **1,130 cases relating to 1,421 murders**. However, the courts correctly ruled that the LIB was not sufficiently independent under Article 2 as there was significant influence over the unit from former RUC personnel within the PSNI. The RUC are the subject of hundreds of investigations and litigation involving collusion with illegal paramilitaries. Importantly, by this stage families had little-to-no confidence in the PSNI's LIB to actually do anything, especially as it was the PSNI who were going to court to prevent bereaved families and survivors from obtaining documents and information the organisation held on the killings of their loved ones.

This lack of confidence also related to a broader strategy in which the PSNI, British Ministry of Defence (MoD), the UK's intelligence agency/security service MI5, and a cabal of retired RUC special branch officers, had been involved in a **deliberate strategy of thwarting progress within the courts and the office of the police ombudsman**. This strategy included the use of **secret courts, national security, public interest immunity**, to non-cooperation with the police ombudsman, and at best a snail's-pace of cooperation with court orders to produce documents, forensic and ballistic evidence, and state witnesses, including those former members responsible for fatal shootings. It also involved the NIO withholding funding for criminal justice processes.

UK Renege on Legacy Agreement & Pursue Amnesty

⁴https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/victims/docs/consultative_group/cgp_230109_report.pdf

⁵ <https://www.northernireland.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/newnigov/haass-report-2013.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.irishnews.com/news/2015/11/27/news/flanagan-critical-of-national-security-smothering-blanket--334991/>

In 2018, the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) decided to engage in a consultation process on the SHA's legacy articles, the aim of which was to drag out and hallow out the agreement that it had signed and committed itself to back in 2014. **Victims of violence made their voices heard in 17,000 submissions calling for the full implementation of the SHA. These voices were ignored.** The NIO did not get the required outcome from the consultation and so parked the process. The Irish government were highly critical of the UK approach throughout.

On March 18, 2020, the British government announced, in a ministerial statement⁷, they were not going to implement the legacy mechanisms agreed in the SHA despite protestations from the Irish government and all the political parties. Like the GFA, this is also an international agreement.

Without any sense of self-reflection, the British appointed Secretary to the North of Ireland, Brandon Lewis MP, announced that the courts, the investigations outstanding, inquests, and civil cases were not working or delivering to victims. **Lewis went on to say that his government made a manifesto pledge to 'protect veterans' and would not allow former British soldiers to be subjected to what he termed 'witch-hunts' and 'vexatious' claims.** However, these false assertions masked a reality that, when free from interference, the courts and the police ombudsman had the ability to deliver to families, albeit in small numbers. It was more the case that what was emerging in the courts and through police ombudsman reports was both damning and damaging exposure of systemic collusion, murder, and cover-ups through impunity for state actors and their agents within illegal paramilitaries. This was more about stopping such findings that countered the UK's self-serving conflict-narrative. The UK was now using its sovereignty as a shield.

Lewis announced he was now going to provide a blanket amnesty to protect soldiers, police and state agents involved in murders and other forms of egregious violations including torture. This would be achieved by extending the Overseas Operation (Amnesty) Bill to include the North of Ireland. However, in order to provide amnesty to the above category, the legal advice he received was that an amnesty would have to be extended to every group involved in the conflict, otherwise it could be legally challenged. Without hesitation, that's precisely what Lewis then proposed. Outrage ensued across the religious and political divide.

In an unusual move, the **Irish Catholic Bishops issued a very critical statement of the UK** position calling them out⁸, as did the Irish government and all the political parties. The statement was an indication of how grave the matter was.

In July 2021, Lewis presented his **Command Paper for a blanket amnesty.** This too, was roundly condemned, including international criticisms from the **UN, USA Congressional Representatives, the US Senate,** and the European body responsible for the enforcement of rulings by the ECtHR, the Committee of Ministers for the Council of Europe, and from the European Commissioner for Human Rights.

On May 10, 2022, the British government tabled legislation in the UK parliament entitled ***The Northern Ireland (NI) Troubles (Legacy & Reconciliation) Bill.*** There was no ministerial statement made in parliament during this process or any debate. This effectively became the first reading.

On May 17, a second reading occurred. Lewis announced that **the UK government would be dispensing with normal procedures of debate and scrutiny of the Bill by various parliamentary committees** and that a debate on the legislation by the Whole House would be suffice. This approach prohibits any amendments; though it must be stated that numerous leading law experts, including the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, have all stated that this Bill is so fundamentally flawed that it is beyond redemption via amendment. **In effect, the Bill is being fast-tracked into law.**

The Northern Ireland (NI) Troubles (Legacy & Reconciliation) Bill

⁷ <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2020-03-18/HLWS163>

⁸ <https://www.catholicbishops.ie/2020/04/08/catholic-bishops-in-northern-ireland-criticise-uk-governments-approach-to-legacy-of-the-past/>

This UK government Bill will establish an 'Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery (ICRIR)'. But don't be fooled by the title. It will shut down, permanently, the rights of those bereaved and injured to remedy and redress by banning all investigations, inquests, and all future civil actions. Instead, the ICRIR will hold secret reviews and then determine what will be disclosed. It will not involve, in any way, the next-of-kin of those murdered. It is completely absent of legal norms and standards. It is, clearly, not independent, despite the title. It will hollow out the fundamental rights and freedoms enshrined in the Good Friday Agreement and thus seriously undermines and threatens the Agreement. When examined, this is a blanket immunity, impunity amnesty Bill.

Crucially, the Bill provides for an unprecedented blanket amnesty and its primary motivation is to shield the British military, intelligence services and the RUC (special branch) from investigation and exposure to systemic policies and practices from: torture; the frequent use of lethal force; shoot-to-kill; extra-judicial killings; political assassination; and collusion with illegal paramilitaries (on all sides), which resulted in hundreds of people killed and thousands injured. In seeking to achieve the above amnesty objective, all groupings and organisations that were responsible for killings during the conflict will also benefit; (though not an intended consequence but a legal requirement to try and insulate the Bill against legal challenge). Altogether, it is unconscionable.

This Bill will provide amnesty for murder, attempted murder, kidnapping, torture, sexual violence (including rape) and disappearances, regardless of who the perpetrators were - all sides - state parties and non-state parties - that were involved in the violence. In this respect, the Bill is perpetrator-centred and perpetrator-led – it is anti-victim. The Bill covers the period from January 1966 to April 1998.

Contrast this government's approach with the commitment in the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) that: *"It is essential to acknowledge and address the suffering of the victims of violence as a necessary element of reconciliation"*⁹.

The Bill is the very antithesis of reconciliation despite the UK government very cynically – deceitfully - using the word in virtually every statement (the Bill title) including telling victims this is in their best interests when, clearly, it is not.

This Bill has absolutely no political support, whatsoever, on the island of Ireland. It has been roundly rejected by the Irish government, all the political parties from across the political and religious divide, and, importantly, from victims of all persuasions and backgrounds. These include the families of British soldiers, RUC officers, IRA volunteers, loyalists, and, importantly, the majority of those killed who were civilians, including hundreds of children, boys and girls, women, scores of mothers, some of whom were pregnant when killed, fathers, grandparents, and even clergy.

In the UK, the British Labour Party, the main opposition party, and all the other political parties in the UK parliament, are opposed to the Bill. Indeed, groups representing the British military veterans are also opposed to it. However, given the Tory majority, the Bill passed its second reading on May 17 by 285 votes to 208, a majority of 77.

Leading lawyers and legal academics have said the extent of the Bill's provisions are unprecedented globally and go beyond that of the Pinochet regime in Chile.

There was no public consultation process about the Bill or engagement with any stakeholders, political parties or the Irish government. The UK government acted unilaterally and outside of the terms of the Good Friday Agreement in so far as this affects citizens across the island of Ireland and therefore does require engagement with the Irish government as a co-guarantor of the GFA. And not least that the Stormont House Agreement (SHA) on legacy and addressing the past was an international agreement between both governments and all the political parties to which the UK reneged on in favour of what is, clearly, a self-serving Bill.

⁹ Reconciliation and Victims of Violence, Rights Safeguards and Equality of Opportunity, pt11 page 18

The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC), established under the GFA with the primary function of ensuring that legislation is both compatible with the GFA and the ECHR/HRA (1998), was not consulted.

The Bingham Centre for the Rule of Law in England and Wales, said: “ *The Bill undermines the rule of law by being neither accountable or democratic*”. They’ve also added that it breaches the ECHR, and the NIHRC also said it breached common law and the Police Act.

This Bill fundamentally undermines the GFA as it is not compatible with the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and the Human Rights Act (1998), the very foundation on which the agreement is built. The Irish government said it was in breach of the ECHR.

This Bill seriously undermines the rule of law, due process and the administrations of justice – all hard won achievements as part of the GFA, including policing and criminal justice reforms and structures, and accompanying inbuilt safeguards and rights. The Bill undermines the authority of the Lord Chief Justice, the Attorney General, the courts and the legislative Assembly established under the GFA, whereby the elected Assembly must consent to any Westminster legislation by way of a Legislative Consent Motion (LCM). As noted, all the Assembly parties reject the Bill in its entirety. This Bill will also dispense with the LCM process.

The Bill will:

- Prevent 450 cases into approximately 500 murders currently awaiting investigation by the Police Ombudsman, including those that are ongoing
- Prevent investigations of a further 1,130 cases relating to 1,421 murders that remain unsolved and parked within the PSNI’s Legacy Investigations Branch (LIB) awaiting Article 2-compliant investigations
- Prevent any future inquests from being opened by the Attorney General (AG) including deciding which inquests that are scheduled to be heard, including those up and running, that should be closed down
- Prevent any future civil litigation in the courts
- These measures constitute a clear breach of Article 2 ECHR/HRA (1998) and the GFA, and a lockdown on justice
- The Bill makes provision for the Secretary of State to gather and retain every shred of evidence from documents, reports, to ballistic, forensic and bio-metric material held by every government agency, courts, police, military etc. including public records, and hold such under their exclusive control. It will be an offence for any public body not to cooperate
- Most disturbing, the Bill permits the Secretary of State to order the complete destruction of evidence with provision to do so at the end of the ICIR process
- This would intentionally deny any future process post the ICIR, and this Tory government, that will no doubt be required
- The British government will appoint its own historians to write an ‘official history’ of the conflict

Amnesty:

- Amnesty for grave-gross violations of human rights, for example abduction, kidnap, torture, rape, political assassinations, are against international law and the ECHR Article 3 (codified right) and the UN’s Committee Against Torture (UNCAT). This Bill constitutes a breach of these codified rights
- Amnesty will be granted either in general form covering multiple violations or specific covering each violation
- Perpetrators will simply avail of amnesty if they were involved in any activity connected to any conduct related to the ‘Troubles’ on the basis that they provide an account to the best of their ability/memory/knowledge
- There are to be no investigations but rather vague, secret reviews
- Accounts by those seeking amnesty cannot be tested
- There is no public test and no legal standards

- Victims will not be told if a person receives amnesty in respect to an attack that claimed the life of their loved one/s or in which they sustained an injury
- There is no logical or lawful basis for these provisions as contained within this Bill other than for the UK government to protect from scrutiny its armed forces, and agents within illegal paramilitaries, involved in systemic violations in Ireland
- All of the powers in the Bill will be vested exclusively to the British Secretary of State from appointing all positions, determining all matters from what can and cannot be reviewed, who will qualify for amnesty (he/she reserves the power to refuse amnesty and overturn any decision that would grant amnesty), disclosure of information, to closing down scheduled and ongoing inquests, and cases within the courts
- This Bill now brings together all of the various tactics deployed by UK state and its agencies over the past two decades in thwarting families' legal rights to truth, justice and accountability. In many instances, these are the very same agencies responsible for violations. The same agencies that shield and protect killers; destroy evidence; and ensure that justice within the courts grinds to a halt. Resorting to the persistent use of public interest immunity certificates (gagging orders), misuse of national security clauses, secret courts barring lawyers and families from hearings about the murders of their loved ones, the majority which were civilians, women and children killed by illegal paramilitaries, tells its own narrative. This Bill conveniently saves the constant public facing questions of why a government and its security agencies, military and intelligence police, would have need to use such measures in hundreds of murders in which illegal paramilitaries were responsible. It is all about hiding truth and preventing further reputational damage. It legalises immunity and impunity. It is a Bill of shame. It is, in every sense, draconian.

Impact on Victims of Violence:

- This Bill will further aggravate existing trauma, causing further hurt and harm
- It will continue the cycle of transgenerational trauma within families, where new generations, not even born when a relative was murdered, grow up in homes framed by the unresolved issues about the murder of a family member that are oftentimes constant and interrupt daily family life
- Where memories, photos, birthdays, and key family events are also marked by an absence and silence and where they see the traumatic impact on their parents and grandparents, aunts and uncles
- Where newer generations are now engaged in seeking answers and justice for egregious violations
- Where hope and encouragement flowed from the GFA and the enshrined rights it afforded victims who began to take gentle safe steps in processes emerging and governmental promises made through agreements about delivering truth and justice only to have seen such commitments dashed time and time again
- This takes an immeasurable toll
- To have seen ageing relatives pass away waiting on promised processes to deliver justice where the mantra within the victims community is that they're (UK govt) just waiting on us all to die
- Where the cumulative effect on wider society of not addressing the past in a proper way negatively impacts more widely socially, civically, culturally, politically and economically
- This Bill will cause so much harm and it will – it is - retraumatising thousands of victims

Victims and Survivors' "Asks"

We respectfully request US Representatives to consider the following:

- For the US House Foreign Affairs Committee/Helsinki Commission/Tom Lantos Commission to consider holding a Congressional Hearing/s to scrutinise the Bill
- A House Resolution/Motion
- Representatives to write to the UK government raising concerns/objections to the Bill and the implications it has for the GFA, stability, the rule of law and administration of justice, and not least in the context of a society still emerging from and feeling the effects of three decades of bloody conflict for which no effective human rights compliant remedy for redress yet exists
- Write to US Secretary Anthony Blinken urging his diplomatic intervention
- Urge President Biden's Administration to also raise this matter again stressing that this Bill will cause irreparable harm to the Good Friday Agreement Peace Accord and undermine wider community confidence
- Work to get the UK back to the principles and commitments made in the GFA and the international agreement it made on legacy and addressing the past at Stormont House back in December 2014
- Former US Secretary Madelene Albright wrote about the power of convening. We ask that the Biden Administration convene a summit of both the Irish and UK government's, all the local political parties to the devolved institutions, NGO's representing those bereaved and injured (which include and is comprised of victims and survivors), and that such a summit also seek advices from the European Commissioner on Human Rights and the UN Special Rapporteur on Truth, Justice, Reparations & Guarantees of Non-Recurrence.

Statements by An Taoiseach & other political leaders on the Bill including the NIHRC

“I don’t think that’s positive and I don’t think it’s helpful in terms of the overall architecture of the Good Friday Agreement. The Bill creates essentially the guts of an amnesty for people who committed terrible crimes, irrespective of whether they were security forces or members of various paramilitary groups who committed terrible crimes. For many of those paramilitary groups, this is literally a get-out-of-jail legislation from any further investigation.”

- An Taoiseach Micheál Martin TD, leader of Fianna Fáil, speaking to media in Belfast following multi-party discussions, 20th May 2022

“I have serious concerns (about this Bill) and cannot support it in its current form.”

- Minister for Foreign Affairs Simon Coveney TD, Deputy Leader Fine Gael, Dept of Foreign Affairs Press Release 18th May 2022

“The British Government proposes by close of business this evening to legislate for an end to families being able to take any civil actions or litigation and by the end of the year it will have blocked families from accessing inquests. Furthermore, it is proceeding with an amnesty for its troops. This is an outrage. It is totally outside of international law. I have to say, it means definitively now the shredding of the Stormont House Agreement. It is to me akin to the actions of a rogue state. The British Government again acts unilaterally and refuses to implement that which is agreed. It refuses to work in partnership with anybody or with the Irish Government. Above all else, it treats families and survivors with utter contempt.”

- MaryLou McDonald TD, President Sinn Féin, Leader’s Questions, Dáil Eireann, 17th May 2022

“Unilateral action by the British government in presenting their Legacy Bill seeks to pull down the shutters on hundreds of family campaigns for truth and justice. Prioritising the demands of their state forces over families is unjust and cruel. I stand with the families.”

- First Minister Designate NI Assembly, Michelle O’Neill, Twitter, 17th May 2022

“It is unworkable and incompatible with the principles of justice, the rule of law and reconciliation, and it is not compatible with international human rights standards either...given the Bill’s failure to uphold the European convention on human rights, we could argue that it breaches the Good Friday Agreement.”

- Stephen Farry MP, Deputy Leader Alliance Party 2nd Reading Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Bill, Westminster Parliament, 24th May 2022

“The idea that this legislation will bring truth to families is absolute nonsense. The pretence from this Government that the legislation is about victims or reconciliation is frankly an out and out lie. This is about politics and a manifesto commitment—about protecting the state, as it always is. It will protect every single perpetrator who committed those crimes in Northern Ireland. I cannot find anybody, apart from Government Members, who believe that this legislation is the way forward.”

- Colum Eastwood MP, Leader Social and Democratic Labour Party, 2nd Reading Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Bill, Westminster Parliament, 24th May 2022

“The full implications, I don’t believe, are fully understood by many involved. I think it has united the families of many victims of terrible atrocities against the measures of the British Government. It is a unilateral measure again. And I have concerns about the unilateral strain within the current British Government towards aspects of the Good Friday Agreement. The Bill does not provide victims’ families with a process they can trust. In fact, it deepens their pain and trauma.”

- Peter Kyle MP, Shadow Secretary of State, Labour Party, 2nd Reading Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Bill, Westminster Parliament, 24th May 2022

“Many victims feel that they have been hit by a double whammy by the Bill—their route to justice cut off and, at the same time, their route to the truth restricted.”

- Julian Smith MP, former Secretary of State, Conservative Party, 2nd Reading Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Bill, Westminster Parliament, 24th May 2022

“As president of the regimental association of the Ulster Defence Regiment, I speak to many UDR widows who are crying out for justice and want the opportunity to have the murders of their loved ones investigated in an article 2-compliant investigation.”

- Sir Jeffrey Donaldson MP, Leader Democratic Unionist Party, 2nd Reading Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Bill, Westminster Parliament, 24th May 2022

“We do all agree in Northern Ireland that this Bill is wrong, that this Bill will not command support, that this Bill drives a coach and horses through the pursuit of justice”

- Gavin Robinson MP, Democratic Unionist Party, 2nd Reading Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Bill, Westminster Parliament, 24th May 2022

“What it also means is police will be prevented from investigating, the courts will be prevented from ruling, prosecutions will be prevented ... that is a very substantial interference with the rule of law and with everything the UK has signed up to. On its face, it clearly isn’t (human rights compliant), it’s clearly in breach of the Human Rights Act. We have gone through this Bill in real detail, piece by piece and also as a whole to see whether there is anything redeeming in it that could be made compatible or could save this Bill from being found to be incompatible.”

- Alyson Kilpatrick Chief Human Rights Commissioner to the NI Human Rights Commission to Northern Ireland Affairs Committee 07/06/2022



Relatives for Justice is recognised by the Inland Revenue as a Registered Charity NIC101311; And a Company Limited by Guarantee NI044611. Relatives for Justice are an organisational member of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy under membership number: 171736

This Briefing has been supported and made possible by the good offices of the Ancient Order of Hibernians, to whom, including Sean Pender National Vice President & Martin Galvin Chair of Freedom for All-Ireland (FFAI), we are gratefully indebted

