

**25<sup>th</sup> Nov, 2007**

## **UUP Deposition**

Dealing with the trauma, whether physical or psychological, created by our past. This issue is a central precursor to moving forward.

Our society has suffered enormously since the late 60's from terrorism and the sectarian division associated with our conflict.

Our community has had its basic foundations weakened and strained by indiscriminate murder and destruction to such an extent that we are left with a situation in which, almost some forty years after the start of the so-called 'troubles', we must decide when criminality is at a 'normal' level.

We do not yet live in a normal society; indeed, achieving such a society is one of the fundamental reasons for events such as this. However, a normal society may not emerge in our lifetime if we do not adequately deal with the past and its repercussions.

This deposition from the Ulster Unionist Party is predicated on three principles.

We do not equate victims with perpetrators.

We believe that each and every victim's situation is personal and specific and any process must reflect this- victims must not be subject to a loose generic system but to one that is flexible, and victim centred.

We agree that there is no hierarchy of victim hood-rather it is spectrum.

We are focussed primarily on the established of agreed principles in order to provide the necessary framework for victims' issues to be dealt with sensitively and fairly.

We have just passed through a traditional period of remembrance of those killed in war or as a result of terrorist activity- sadly something that we in Northern Ireland have been well used to. We support efforts to remember the sacrifice made in our recent period of trouble. Protestant, Roman Catholic and Dissenter- all fell at the hands of terrorists and we do not want to see them forgotten.

Further, many who survived still carry the scars, physical and/or mental of that which perpetrated upon our community during this period. This trauma needs to be alleviated to the satisfaction of these victims of our past.

In remembrance, however, we are aware of the efforts of perpetrators of violence to sanitise their respective murder campaigns. The effort of terrorists to legitimise their actions creates the problem that we have been able to get around- how to remember and to reconcile.

We have conflicting views of the troubles: why they started, how both sides conducted the experience, who won or lost, etc. The Ulster Unionist Party accepts that this is an enormously complex issue. We acknowledge that we do not have, and are highly unlikely to ever have, a single narrative of the troubles. That is why it may be unlikely that we will ever come up with a unanimous and mutually acceptable definition of who is, or is not, a victim.

Nevertheless, we believe that only those who have suffered at the hands of terrorists- not the terrorists themselves- are true victims of the troubles.

It is only right that account is taken of responsibility and criminal culpability in determining society's collective approach. Those people who operated outside the framework of civic society, who acted beyond law and order and acceptable civilised values and sought to remove from others the most fundamental of all rights- the right to life-, cannot be classed as victims and survivors.

Many will ask to do so would be insensitive and gravely insulting to those who are blameless and innocent.

The Nationalist/Republican community appears to expect two standards in a truth and reconciliation process: full disclosure and accountability from the forces of law and order and, from terrorist organisations, codes of honour that allow for secrecy.

To accept a wholesale truth recovery process beyond the normal procedure for investigating alleged wrongdoing by police officers and soldiers would clearly be a one sided farce. That situation will remain unless and until the republican movement decides to be fully open and truthful about its hopefully past activities.

The state has a burden of responsibility to uphold law and order. When that fails it has a duty of care to the victims of resultant crime. Such responsibility does not diminish if such crime is committed in pursuance of insurrection, insurgency or separatism. The Ulster Unionist Party believes that, in our situation, the states burden is best carried by a Commissioner and/or Commission for Victims and Survivors.

A Victims' Forum has been suggested. Such a Forum, adequately constituted, could be of assistance to a Commissioner/Commission in the co-ordination of financial, political and health help for victims of the troubles and in the dispersal of information.

Many projects, such as the Healing Through Remembering story-telling project, provide an excellent means of helping victims and survivors to heal old wounds and achieve some sense of closure. The Forum could be a focus for such projects and make them accessible to those who wish to avail of them. We acknowledge that the perpetrators of violence must be dealt with in a manner conducive to normalising our society but we must be very clear that this task is separate from helping victims to move on.

There must be clear balance in actions towards separate groups of victims. Support offered must show a value-added approach to the use of public funds. Established victims' groups require funding and such should be co-ordinated subject to what the projects will be achieving. Groups such as SAVER/NAVER, West Tyrone Voice, etc have been providing excellent care and respite for their members. For groups such as these resources need to be firmed up and instituted in the long term to allow them to deal with the needs of their client base into the foreseeable future.

Many of these groups are in a tenuous position, operating from 'hand to mouth' and wondering whether they will be able to open their doors the next day. In recent times these groups have found themselves having to reduce hours and/or lay off essential core workers who have gained irreplaceable understanding and knowledge of their client base. Personnel in whom the client base has confidence and who can empathise fully with those with whom they work.

It is not insensitive and grossly insulting to expect groups that represent victims and survivors of terrorist action to have to sit down with groups that are representative of the perpetrators of such action if they are to access funding that is vital to their survival? Would it not be more productive to let such victims groups grow in confidence and, in their own time-if and when they are ready- engage with others, rather than find themselves being financially blackmailed into doing so?

However, there are individuals who are not part of any group. Many are dealing with their own particular trauma and it may be that they have not realised that we would have recourse to support.