

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to outline way forward to address the legacy of the Troubles

The Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Bill will put in place an effective investigations and information recovery process, underpinned by robust and independent investigations, to provide answers for families, deliver on commitments to those who served in Northern Ireland, and help society to look forward.

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Rt Hon Brandon Lewis MP said:

“The years of the Troubles were an awful period in our history with tragic loss of life across communities. After the signing of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement, challenging compromises were rightly made in support of the peace process – addressing the legacy of the Troubles comprehensively and fairly is another such step forward.

“The current system is failing; it is delivering neither truth nor justice for the vast majority of families. It is letting down victims and veterans alike.

“Every family who lost a loved one, no matter who they were, will be provided with more information than ever before about the circumstances of their death.

“A robust and independent investigations process will be at the heart of this approach, supported by an ambitious and comprehensive oral history programme that will allow people to tell their stories and share their experiences.

“And there will not be any automatic access to immunity; it is right that those involved in an investigation cannot obtain ‘something for nothing.’ Immunity will be provided to individuals who cooperate, which provides the best route to give victims and their families answers they have sought for years as well as giving our veterans the certainty they deserve.”

Following an extensive period of engagement, the Government has amended previous proposals set out in a Command Paper last year to ensure they better meet the needs of those most impacted by the Troubles.

The legislation will ensure that legacy issues are addressed comprehensively and fairly, and in a way that supports information recovery and reconciliation, complies fully with international human rights obligations and responds to the needs of victims and survivors, and society as a whole.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has also announced the UK Government’s intention to commission an Official History relating to the

Troubles. Conducted by independent historians, and underpinned by unprecedented access to the UK documentary record, this will provide an authoritative and in-depth examination of the UK Government's policy towards Northern Ireland during the conflict.

The Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Bill will include the following provisions:

- For victims and survivors, a new independent body – the Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery (ICRIR) – will conduct investigations, consistent with our international obligations, to provide answers for those who want them, in a process supported by full state disclosure and with the power to compel witnesses.
- The ICRIR will grant immunity from prosecution, based on an individual's cooperation with the body's inquiries. Those who do not cooperate with the independent body will not be granted immunity, and will remain liable to prosecution should sufficient evidence exist, or come to light.
- Alongside producing reports on cases it has investigated, the body will also produce a historical record of what is known in relation to all other deaths that occurred during the Troubles.
- A package of memorialisation measures centred on an ambitious, expert-led oral history initiative that will encourage people from all backgrounds to share their experiences and perspectives of the Troubles, and to listen to those of others.

Notes to editors:

As a result of the engagement process conducted following the publication of the Government's Command Paper last year, the legislation also contains the following provisions that further strengthen the legacy package:

- The establishment, management and operations of the ICRIR will be the responsibility of a Panel of Commissioners. This will include a Chief Commissioner of high judicial standing, and a Commissioner for Investigations, who will have the necessary skills and experience to run the Commission's investigative functions. All three will be appointed by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.
- Inquests that have reached the stage of substantive hearing by the date 12 months after the date of introduction or the date by which the ICRIR is operational (whichever comes first) will be allowed to continue.
- Civil claims that already existed on or before the day of the Bill's introduction will be allowed to continue, but new cases will be barred

from this date.

The Government is also taking forward a range of non-legislative measures that will help us to develop a clearer understanding of what happened during the Troubles, and will be supported by a major digitisation project, making official archives more accessible to the public.