**Former Bedfordshire Police chief constable and Head of Operation Kenova, Jon Boutcher.**

**Paul Ainsworth**

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The head of a unit conducting historical investigations into Troubles-era killings has called for "patience" among those awaiting prosecutions on the fifth anniversary of the group's founding.

Jon Boutcher, a former police chief now heading Operation Kenova, which is probing over 200 murders in the north, outlined the work of the unit that was initially set up to investigate whether the RUC failed to probe up to 18 murders in a bid to protect the British agent codenamed Stakeknife who had infiltrated the IRA.

Kenova has since been tasked with investigating other Troubles matters, including over 120 murders attributed to the loyalist Glennane Gang in Armagh and Tyrone's infamous 'murder triangle' area.

To date, Kenova has provided NI's Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) with over 50,000 pages of evidence on 17 murders and 12 abduction cases. Kenova team members have also interviewed over 300 peoples.



Mr Boutcher, the former Chief Constable of Bedfordshire Police, said the DPP was examining 31 files submitted for consideration, with more due to be sent before the end of the year.

He also spoke out against the recent British government 'command paper' on ending all Troubles-era prosecutions and inquests, which critics claim would offer a de-facto amnesty for both paramilitary and security force killers.

"At the heart of all Kenova activity is the victims, survivors and families who have been affected by these terrible crimes," Mr Boutcher said.

"Despite the many setbacks, delays and unfulfilled promises of the past experienced by a great many families their strength, determination and dignity in relentlessly pursuing the truth whatever obstacles are placed in their way is truly inspirational. The humility and grace demonstrated by the families in seeking to address the injustice they have faced is a lesson to us all."

An interim report is due to be published by Operation Kenova within the next 12 months as part of a wider protocol that will outline the future release of public reports.

Mr Boutcher continued: "Some people have commented that Kenova has not yet resulted in prosecutions. The number of files presented to the DPP NI demonstrates what can be achieved evidentially. We must be patient and await his decisions. It is important that everyone recognises that prosecutions will be rare. The most recent timescale for prosecution decisions advised by the DPP NI regarding the Kenova files is the spring of 2022."