20th October 2020

 Houses of Parliament

Westminster

London

SW1A 0AA

To All Westminster MPs

Brian Service was 35 years old when he was shot in the back and in the head in October 1998 in a random sectarian attack by loyalist paramilitaries as he walked home to his parents’ house in north Belfast.

When his mother Ann, now an 81 year old widow, was told he was dead she said:

“I just wanted to lie down on the ground where he died alone to be close to him even for that moment”.

Almost three years ago Ann wrote a heartfelt letter to the then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland James Brokenshire MP telling him about Brian:

“…so that you know that Brian was a real person because after his murder that’s not the way he was treated.

The police hardly seem to bother with an investigation.

It was as if he never really existed as a person and that his life and death did not matter.

My husband Davy died in 2013 knowing no more about what happened to our son than we did when the police came to our house at 7am that day to tell us he was dead.

Please don’t let us be forgotten all over again”

In the letter she called for the proposed legacy institutions from the Stormont House Agreement to be put in place while she is still alive.

Responding to Ann’s letter, Mr Brokenshire wrote:

“The government believes that the Stormont House Agreement proposals represent the best means of addressing Northern Ireland’s past in ways that will be fair, balanced and proportionate”.

On 18 March 2020 the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Brandon Lewis MP, unilaterally and without reference to any victims and survivors stakeholder groups announced through a two page Written Ministerial Statement that the Stormont House Agreement and the legacy proposals contained it in were to be set aside.

It was clear from both the timing of the Written Ministerial Statement and subsequent briefings to the media in Great Britain that the focus is now on protecting military veterans by permanently closing as many as 90% of Troubles related cases following a speedy desk top review.

**This will be a de facto amnesty which will cover the vast majority of murders which were carried out by republican and loyalist paramilitaries.**

Not only would the permanent closure of unresolved cases be without legal precedent it would deal a devastating blow to all those bereaved, like Ann Service, to be told that the state no longer has any interest in what happened to their loved ones.

Ann’s case is just one example of so many during the Troubles that is reflected across all communities where relatives have never been engaged by the authorities and not given even basic information about their loved one’s death.

These families deserve to be acknowledged, to be heard and it is time we explained as best as we can what happened to their loved ones.

This obviously includes the families of murdered members of the security forces who suffer immeasurably like all others.

This is about giving all families the information that we would normally assume, to some degree at least, would have been provided at the time as it would elsewhere in the UK.

But in too many cases in Northern Ireland it was not.

**Far from aiding healing and reconciliation what is proposed in the Written Ministerial Statement would represent an egregious act of betrayal leading to bitterness and frustration that will pass from generation to generation.**

The vast majority of bereaved victims and survivors fully understand that there is little prospect of convictions in Troubles related murders.

What they want above all is to know that the life and death of their loved one mattered and that their murder has been properly investigated.

The Northern Ireland Affairs Committee opened an investigation into the new proposals on 29 April 2020.

WAVE Trauma Centre is the largest cross community victims and survivors support group in Northern Ireland and gave evidence to NIAC.

In it we stressed that there is a cost effective, efficient, Article Two ECHR compliant model for resolving cases currently in operation in Northern Ireland.

Operation Kenova could readily be scaled up as Jon Boucher former Chief Constable of Bedfordshire who heads the investigation team, set out in his evidence to the Committee.

I would urge you to review his evidence before legislation based on the Written Ministerial Statement comes before Parliament.

In a letter to the Committee on 11 September 2020 the Secretary of State wrote that it would not be appropriate for him to give evidence to the Committee because:

“…we (the Northern Ireland Office) are currently at an important stage of policy consideration, including sensitive engagement with key stakeholders through September’.

When WAVE last spoke with the Secretary of State on 19 March, he promised there would be what he described as ‘intensive engagement’ on the issues set out in his Written Ministerial Statement.

We have heard absolutely nothing from him since then.

If what is set out in the Written Ministerial Statement of 18 March, which to date is the only information we have to go on, is enacted it will do untold damage not only to thousands of victims and survivors but also to the reputation of the UK as guarantor of the rights of some of the most vulnerable in our society.

Yours sincerely

Sandra Peake: CEO WAVE Trauma Centre

Cathy McCann: Chair of WAVE Trauma Centre. Cathy’s father was murdered by B Specials (Auxiliary police) in 1969. Case unresolved.

In 1990 Cathy McCann was severely injured as the sole survivor in a roadside bomb in which a nun and three policemen were murdered by the Provisional IRA.

Damien McNally: Former chair of WAVE Trauma Centre. Damien’s father was murdered by loyalists in 1976. Case unresolved.

Rev Dr David Clements: Board member WAVE Trauma Centre. David’s father was an RUC officer murdered by the Provisional IRA in 1985. Case unresolved.

Jean Caldwell: Former staff WAVE Trauma Centre. Jean’s husband was murdered by the Provisional IRA in 1992. Case unresolved.

Ann Service: WAVE Trauma Centre client. Ann’s son Brian was murdered by loyalists in 1998. Case unresolved.