

BAN PLASTIC BULLETS NOW!

United Campaign Against Plastic Bullets

The United Campaign Against Plastic Bullets (UCAPB) expresses its opposition to the British government's latest amnesty proposals.

The group, which seeks to have plastic bullets banned, recently met after holding its annual August vigil in remembrance of those killed and maimed by rubber and plastic bullets at the former RUC/British army barracks on the Andersonstown Road/Glen Road junction.

The former military site was fittingly renamed several years ago as Groves Reilly Corner, in memory of the late Emma Groves who was blinded by a rubber bullet fired at point blank range through her living room window by a member of the British army's parachute regiment, and human rights stalwart Clara Reilly, now retired.

Both women were instrumental in the formation of the UCAPB and Relatives for Justice and spent decades campaigning for human rights and for a ban on plastic bullets.

Speaking exclusively to the ***Andersonstown News*** the families of those killed and maimed by rubber and plastic bullets expressed revulsion and outrage at the British government's proposals to grant its armed forces an amnesty.

Jim and Áine McCabe, whose mother Norah McCabe was shot and killed by a plastic bullet fired by an RUC officer from a passing armoured patrol carrier as she walked along Linden Street in the Clonard area on July 8, 1981, told of how the family struggled for decades seeking truth and justice and of the barriers deliberately placed in their way. Norah died the following day.

Áine said:

"My mammy was shot and killed. I was barely three-months old when she was so cruelly taken from us. I've no memories at all. I only have fond and loving stories from family and friends.

"I'm now a mother with teenage children and the enormity of our loss oftentimes hits me. My mammy missed out on so much as did we.

"My daddy campaigned for years for justice and to have plastic bullets banned. He took the case as far as he possibly could. He faced barriers to justice, obfuscation and denial of what the RUC did and then the administrative official cover-up".

Jim McCabe added:

"Human rights lawyer Pat Finucane represented our family and despite providing film-footage of the shooting at the original inquest, captured by a Canadian TV crew who just happened to be filming a report on the Hunger Strikes as mammy was shot, we still didn't get justice.

"The footage, introduced by Pat after the RUC had all given evidence, exposed the RUC lies about rioting crowds, barricades and petrol bombers on the Falls Road and that they never fired a plastic bullet at the spot where mammy was shot.

"Despite perjuring themselves, in addition to the killing, none were ever charged.

"Pat famously said outside court that if justice couldn't be delivered in this instance given the overwhelming body of irrefutable evidence that it was inconceivable to ever see a case that could deliver justice when concerning the role of the RUC.

"In more recent times we've been considering what steps to take in terms of seeking accountability and possibly reopening the inquest but now the British government are going to shut down investigations, inquests, and civil actions.

"What they're proposing is absolutely outrageous, as are the lengths they're prepared to go to in order to keep a lid on truth and deny justice.

"It's anti-democratic and anti-rule of law".

Christine Duffy, the sister of 15 year-old Seamus Duffy also killed by a plastic bullet fired by the RUC on August 9 1989 in north Belfast said:

"Seamus was a beautiful wee boy full of life.

"His death devastated our family and like all the families who had a loved one killed there's never a day goes by without us thinking of him.

"We never received any justice.

"To be perfectly honest Seamus was singled out and shot because he was wearing a Celtic jersey. Plain and simple. There was no other reason or justification for his killing.

"With the support of Relatives for Justice and our lawyers , KRW Law, we're scheduled to have a fresh inquest under new rules and not the sham inquests that merely rubber-stamped the cover-ups that we were all subjected to when these State killings took place.

"And it's precisely for these reasons, when human rights compliant processes can for the first time examine all the evidence independently and arrive at a verdict, that the British government seek to pass new laws, change the rules, and to hide their actions by banning access to justice.

"The British government is no different than those rogue States they so often are fond of condemning."

Mark and James Kelly spoke about the shooting of their sister Carol-Ann Kelly.

Mark Kelly said:

"Carol-Ann was 12 years-old when killed by a plastic bullet fired by the British army on May 19 1981 just outside our home in Twinbrook, a housing estate on the outskirts of west Belfast.

"She never regained consciousness and died a few days later from horrific head injuries.

"I witnessed the shooting. I was 13. It never leaves you.

"It was a beautiful summer's evening around 9.30pm and we were playing football in the large open space carpark between the backs of two rows of houses.

"Back then not many people had cars and it was our playground on our doorstep.

"A pathway between the rows led to an open and slightly elevated green area to the right that was overlooked by a small row of houses. That row contained our home.

"Carol-Ann was just in front of me on the pathway when an armoured patrol was passing on the main road.

"There was absolutely no trouble or rioting. It was tranquil beforehand.

"Plastic bullets were suddenly fired and we hesitated, stopping and taking shelter in what safety there was in the pathway and back garden fencing that obscured us from the open green area and the road just beyond where the patrol were driving.

"Carol-Ann stepped out - the shot rang out - and she fell in front of me.

"I knew then the shot was fatal.

"My late mother did all she could, along with my elder sisters, to get justice.

"To be fair a soldier in the second military carrier, traveling slightly behind the lead one from which the fatal shot was fired, stopped and exited on seeing that Carol-Ann, a child, was lying there.

"He immediately dropped his rifle and ran to her aid trying his best to help. All this whilst another patrol stopped the ambulance at the entrance to Twinbrook delaying emergency aid.

"At the inquest the other soldiers lied. They said there was a riot. But if there was a riot then why did that soldier simply abandon his rifle and go straight to Carol-Ann?

"We were told later he was disciplined for leaving his rifle - but no one held to account for what happened to our wee sister.

"The peace process has provided space, reflection and opportunity to re-examine all those killings for which there has never been justice and for the very first time those who pulled the triggers and covered up might possibly be asked in an independent way to account for their actions.

"And so began the nonsense - the propaganda - that British soldiers and RUC members are the victims of so-called 'witch-hunts' and 'vexatious' investigations and prosecutions.

"Leading the charge on these claims is Boris Johnson and in the face of the rule of law being applied he wants an amnesty to 'protect' British soldiers who killed our loved ones.

"But it is British police, British prosecutors and British courts examining these matters and they are loyal to and act in the name of the British Crown. This exposes Johnson's proposals as nonsense.

James Kelly added:

"When faced with the prospect of independent scrutiny the British government go on the run and seek an amnesty.

"For decades they lectured everyone about the necessity for adherence to the rule of law and primacy of democracy and yet the first chance families get to even have a glimpse of truth and justice for State killings this is their reaction.

"Calling them hypocrites is too generous.

"Our mother decided to show the world exactly what the British army, and its government, did to our family and our beloved Carol-Ann by permitting her to be photographed in her coffin.

"They say a picture speaks a thousand words - her angelic bruised face - infinitely demanding justice and the banning of plastic bullets.

"This was no easy decision for her as it was also a constant reminder but she never wanted anyone else, least of all a child, to suffer a similar fate.

"We'll never give up and will always speak her name, show her picture and demand justice and an end to the use of plastic bullets".

Margaret McGuinness, daughter of Peter McGuinness shot and killed with a plastic bullet fired by the RUC at his home in the Bawnmore area of north Belfast on August 9 1981 added:

"My daddy and mammy had come out of the house to challenge a small group of youths who had thrown a petrol bomb in our street and which landed in and around our front garden.

"The youths had long since dispersed and as mammy and daddy were chatting to a neighbour, who had also come out of his home, the RUC drove up in two armoured jeeps, stopped, and fired a plastic bullet virtually at point blank range striking daddy in the chest.

"It was exactly 10 years to the day when my Uncle, Joseph Murphy, was killed by the British Army in Ballymurphy.

"My Aunt lost her husband and then her brother. We lost our father, and an uncle.

"It was just indescribable. The heartache, pain and trauma was incalculable.

"There's never been any justice. Just recently the inquest into Ballymurphy cleared my uncle, my mammy's brother, of any wrongdoing as the British army claimed he was a gunman, just as the RUC falsely claimed there was a riot when they killed my daddy.

"We intend to achieve two things - to clear my daddy's name also, and ban plastic bullets.

"But now Boris Johnson wants to prevent the clearing of the names of those people his armed forces shot and killed and falsely labelled as 'rioters' and 'gunmen'.

"He wants to maintain the lies and falsehoods that persist to this day as to do otherwise would expose exactly what went on here for decades.

"I'd say this is more about preventing reputational damage to the British government but others say they no longer have a reputation to protect given they've been involved in so much wrongdoing and human rights violations here".

Jim Rowntree concluded:

"Our Francis loved sport. Gaelic football, soccer, you name it he'd be doing it sports wise. He just loved life.

"He was 11 when he was killed by a rubber bullet fired by the British army from a parked military Saracen in the Divis Flats area, in the Lower Falls, on April 20 1972.

"Like Carol-Ann he died a few days after being shot. He never regained consciousness.

"It broke my parents' hearts - it was very difficult for us all and like all the families you never get over it, you just learn to cope better.

"Like many of these shootings those doing the killing always claimed there was rioting but we all know this not to be true.

"The rubber bullet that struck Francis was 'doctored'. A large battery had been inserted into it prior to firing.

"This was oftentimes carried out and especially by the British army who tended to also insert metal objects and coins so as to inflict even worse physical damage on impact - if such a thing is possibly given the lethal nature of these weapons.

"My parents passed away without any justice or accountability whatsoever.

"In the aftermath of the killing, and like many of the families, we were targeted for harassment by the British army - house-raids, stop and search, threats.

"It was all part and parcel of trying to intimidate you from speaking out about what they'd done.

"But we never gave up and we were able to petition the Attorney General with the help of Relatives for Justice and our lawyer Padraig O' Muirigh and secure a fresh inquest.

"This refuted the claims of rioting and cleared Francis' name and we await any matters arising against the soldiers responsible.

"We're also taking a civil case against the MoD and the British government.

"But now the UK government want to bring a halt to all these processes of truth seeking and accountability.

"It's totally wrong and smacks of everything to hide.

"Going down this route will impact negatively on wider society and not just the families. It totally sends the wrong messages about law and order, justice and due process.

"It was an absence of these values that contributed most to fuelling the conflict.

"Justice comes with peace - let it be done".

The group has also written to the justice minister, Naomi Long, the policing board and PSNI chief constable, Simon Byrne, seeking meetings about the recent use of plastic bullets and to reiterate the Campaign demand that they be banned.