# Amnesty warns Labour government risks betraying victims over Legacy Act anniversary



Grainne Teggart, the Northern Ireland deputy director for Amnesty International, addressed the media outside the Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery (ICRIR) in Belfast, where victims, families, and human rights organisations gathered to mark the one-year anniversary of the UK government's Legacy Act. This controversial legislation has been disparaged by many as a “guillotine on truth,” effectively shutting down any meaningful attempts to address the legacy of the Northern Ireland conflict.

The anniversary has become a rallying point for those demanding action in light of the government’s disheartening decision to stifle due process for victims. Teggart and her fellow advocates are not simply commemorating the loss of justice pathways; they are insisting on governmental accountability. This urgency is heightened by a recent Court of Appeal ruling that condemned the UK government's refusal to conduct a public inquiry into the 1997 murder of GAA official Sean Brown as unlawful. Northern Ireland Secretary of State Hilary Benn has a deadline to reconsider this decision, which has ominously passed.

Instead of complying, Benn announced the government's intention to seek an extension and leave to appeal to the Supreme Court—a move many perceive as an audacious tactic designed to dodge accountability. Brown was brutally abducted and murdered, with intelligence documents suggesting links to state agents. His widow, Bridie Brown, has attended court sessions 58 times over nearly three decades, still waiting for answers. The government’s evasive responses perpetuate a cycle of delays and legal wrangling that frustrates victims and their families.

Compounding this dismal situation is the UK government’s troubling pattern of challenging significant court rulings on legacy matters rather than providing the long-overdue truth and justice that victims deserve. The credibility of the ICRIR has come under heavy scrutiny, with victims’ organisations and rights groups expressing serious reservations about its effectiveness and impartiality.

In his recent speeches, Labour leader Keir Starmer hailed the Good Friday Agreement as “Labour’s greatest achievement.” Yet critics contend that the actions of this new Labour government starkly contradict the principles enshrined in that Agreement. They assert that any genuine shift in relations between the UK and Irish governments must confront the unresolved injustices of the past, something the current regime seems reluctant to do.

The Legacy Act has faced substantial backlash for entrenching a culture of impunity in the name of reconciliation. Subsequent court rulings have deemed many key provisions unlawful, leaving victims to fight for justice through complex legal avenues. Although some have won small victories, their calls for a complete repeal of the Act continue to go unanswered, as the government’s fragmented approach leaves families mired in bureaucratic limbo.

During the recent general election campaign, the Labour Party promised a repeal and replacement of the Legacy Act. Yet signs are emerging that such commitments are fading, indicating a preference for piecemeal reforms instead. This trajectory would signify a notable retreat from previous assurances, potentially betraying the trust of those who depend on meaningful change.

For families seeking answers for decades, further delays and broken promises only add to their suffering. Teggart argues that the Labour government must decide whether to stand by its commitments or continue down a path viewed as obstructive. She insists on the urgent need for support for those pursuing truth and justice, rather than additional barriers.

Amidst a backdrop of “national security”-driven strategies and the pervasive use of the “Neither Confirm Nor Deny” policy, victims' families are left to grapple with historical wounds that are continually reopened. As the anniversary of the Legacy Act passes, Teggart and her allies are resolute: accountability and truth cannot be sidelined, nor can genuine reconciliation arise from continued obstruction.

The actions of the Labour government regarding these critical issues will be scrutinised, as the controversy surrounding the Legacy Act intensifies. The call for justice resonates not just within Northern Ireland but across the UK, underscoring the demand for a government truly committed to accountability and reform, rather than one that simply perpetuates the status quo.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

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