

'Come and see where innocent were cut down'



'DISSATISFIED': West Belfast MP Gerry Adams joined the relatives of those murdered by the Parachute Regiment in August 1971 in Ballymurphy during their meeting with the Secretary of State

Families throw down challenge to Secretary of State Paterson

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FAMILIES of those killed in the Ballymurphy massacre have issued a challenge to the British Secretary of State to come to West Belfast and visit the sites where their loved ones were slaughtered.

The campaign group spoke out following last week's meeting with Secretary of State Owen Paterson, which left them "dissatisfied".

The Tory MP listened to individual stories about the horrific 1971 massacre, in which 11 people were cut down by Paratrooper gunfire over a period of three days following the introduction of internment.

Mr Paterson heard how innocents, including a mother-of-eight and a local parish priest, were mercilessly gunned down during the massacre, and was told how the families are now seeking an independent international investigation into what happened, along with an apology from the British government.

A request was also made for a meeting with Prime Minister David Cameron, and the families hope to receive an apology similar to the one Mr Cameron issued in the British parliament following the release of the Bloody Sunday report in June.

However, the summit at Stormont, at which the families were accompanied by West Belfast MP Gerry Adams and SDLP councillor Tim Attwood, "didn't go well", with the only positive outcome being a promise from Mr Paterson of another meeting in January.

"Why the discussion of our case will have to take until then, I don't know," said John Teggart, whose father Daniel was killed in the massacre.

"It didn't go well, but we are a strong group, and we will continue to campaign for our goals. We have a case that needs to be answered, and the evidence is there that what happened in 1971 was a crime by the Paratroopers, and we want an apology.

"We are calling upon Mr Paterson to come to Ballymurphy, and we will walk him round the sites where the victims lost their lives, just as we did with Bishop Noel Treanor a few months ago.

"That way he can get a real sense of what happened, and

why we are campaigning so strongly for an apology and independent investigation."

Speaking after the meeting, local MP Gerry Adams also criticised the Secretary of State, claiming he failed to show "affinity" with the relatives of those murdered.

"The fact that Owen Paterson agreed to come back to the Ballymurphy families after the New Year is welcome," he said.

"However, the meeting was very unsatisfactory. His attitude to the families was not appropriate. Mr Paterson did not show any sense of affinity with what these families have been through.

"The case the families make is compelling. The British Secretary of State has an opportunity to define his role in a positive way. He has an opportunity to liberate these families and many others by making the right decision. The families are determined to pursue their campaign for truth and an acknowledgement of the innocence of their loved ones."

Mr Attwood added: "During the meeting, I argued that in going forward the British government needed to recognise that while there has been good work done by the Historical Enquiries Team, it is simply not the model that wins the confidence of many families, victims and survivors."