

O'LOAN MEETS FAMILIES OF PARA VICTIMS

Inquiry plea to former Ombudsman

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RELATIVES of 11 people shot dead by Paras in West Belfast 39 years ago want former Police Ombudsman Dame Nuala O'Loan to back an independent probe into the killings.

The families with Dame Nuala in West Belfast on Friday and have described the meeting as "positive".

The group's spokesman John Teggart, whose father Danny was shot 14 times at close range in the 1971 killing spree, said Mrs O'Loan listened intently to how their loved ones lost their lives.

He added: "After the disappointing meeting with [Secretary of State] Owen Paterson on Thursday, we picked ourselves up and met with Nuala on Friday.

"It was a very good meeting.

"Nuala listened to all our stories in turn and listened intently.

"She asked us for some evidence for her to look over and we have over 100 eye-witness accounts that we have collected

ourselves. She was amazed by the evidence we had gathered.

"She said she would go away with what she had heard and decide what she can do for us.

"She has the high profile and experience from working in the Police Ombudsman's Office to help us."

The 44-year-old is one of those pushing for an independent investigation into the killing.

The Ballymurphy killings took place during the Army's Operation Demetrius, to arrest people who would be interned on suspicion of involvement in paramilitary activity.

The troops claimed they opened fire after first being shot at by republicans.

They were shot months before soldiers cut down 14 civil rights marchers in Derry in 1972.

The Ballymurphy victims included a Catholic priest, Father Hugh Mullan, and mother-of-eight Joan Connolly.

Mr Teggart vowed: "We are a strong group and we are going to keep going. We are not going away."

The meeting with Dame Nuala came after talks with Mr Paterson last Thursday, which the group described as "disappointing".

Mr Paterson agreed to meet with the relatives again but made no promises regarding an inquiry. He has repeatedly promised that no more "expensive" inquiries into the past would be held.

Mr Teggart said: "Owen Paterson said he had to speak to other groups affected by the Troubles. We have always said that every person affected by the Troubles deserves to know the truth. We have never got any legal redress.

"We have been gathering evidence since 1998.

"No one from the RUC or PSNI has ever knocked a door over this. The name of our group says it all - it was a massacre."

