

FROM THE OFFICE OF THE JUSTICE MINISTER



Minister's Office Block B,
Castle Buildings
Stormont Estate
Ballymiscaw
Belfast
BT4 3SG
Tel: 028 9076 5725
private.office@justice-ni.x.gsi.gov.uk

Our ref: INV-1173-2020

Nik Williams
Project Manager – Rapid Response Mechanism
European Centre for Press and Media Freedom
nik.williams@ecpmf.eu

9 June 2020

Dear Mr Williams

Thank you for your letter of 20 May. I agree wholeheartedly with the stance you have taken to show support for the journalists in Northern Ireland who have fallen victim to intimidation and threats from paramilitary organisations.

These threats must be condemned by all of us and have no place in Northern Ireland. It is clear that those criminal elements responsible are involved in coercive control of communities and are now attempting to suppress freedom of our press. As I have publically stated, this appalling threat places additional pressures on the journalist, their family and on the police, when they are already dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic and all of the challenges that brings with it. I have urged those who have any information regarding this to contact the police and fully support calls for this threat to be lifted immediately.

You may be interested to know that the Northern Ireland Executive has been working to address the harm caused by paramilitary and organised crime groups in Northern Ireland and to create a society where paramilitarism has no place through its Action Plan. This work is co-ordinated within my Department and is a holistic approach to the

FROM THE OFFICE OF THE JUSTICE MINISTER



issues. The Action Plan includes 38 commitments aimed at preventing people from becoming vulnerable to paramilitary influence, providing support to enable transition away from paramilitary structures, building confidence in the justice system, and implementing new powers and strategies to deal with paramilitary activity.

We are also working in partnership across the Executive to address the systemic issues that build strong, resilient communities where there is no place for paramilitary organisations and activity. Through the Executive Action Plan, and more widely, my Department has made a number of commitments, including: measures to speed up justice and new powers to tackle organised crime; developing a centre of excellence for restorative justice; working with Policing and Community Safety Partnerships to embed a culture of lawfulness; delivering a public awareness campaign on paramilitary style attacks; and implementing assets recovery arrangements. The Department also works closely with the PSNI, which has established the Paramilitary Crime Task Force and is delivering local interventions and problem solving initiatives with the community.

Unfortunately, due to diary pressures, I am unable to commit to a meeting at this time: however, if you would like any more information regarding the Executive programme for tackling paramilitary activity and organised crime my office would be happy to provide more detail on the positive work which is ongoing to create a society in which paramilitarism has no future.

[Redacted signature]

NAOMI LONG MLA
Minister of Justice