

# Judicial Communications Office

13 November 2018

## STATEMENT MADE BY PRESIDING CORONER MRS JUSTICE KEEGAN

It is very clear that yesterday marked an important day for all of those present in court, given that we started these inquests and we have now heard the opening and some of the family statements. I am grateful to the family members who have prepared the statements and come to court. That can't have been easy to do. I will hear the remaining family statements during the remainder of this week and next Thursday.

I have reflected on some of the matters that have been raised in relation to progress of the inquests. You have already heard through the course of the opening that further work is ongoing. However I do want to formally record that it is a credit to all involved in these inquests, including the parties, the legal representatives and the witnesses who have come forward, that the cases have been ready to commence this week.

These cases go back a considerable period of time as we all know. Looking back at my records the families in the cases met with the Lord Chief Justice and previous Presiding Coroners in February 2016 and at that stage no date was set for an inquest. So, we have moved on.

Some issues have been raised by counsel about those who will be giving evidence. I have listened to that and reflected on this over lunchtime.

It is important to state that all of those involved with these incidents which occurred in Ballymurphy in August 1971 have an interest in having the facts surrounding these events established in court at the inquests.

As Mr Doran in his opening pointed out, there are a number of narratives in relation to what occurred and I, as the Coroner want to hear all of the evidence in relation to this that might be relevant to the proceedings.

All those who have information or who may have information also have an obligation to co-operate with these inquests. I want to re-state that position today as we embark upon these inquests. I am concerned therefore to hear that there may be difficulties. I have read the media reports that Mr Mansfield provided to me and I thank him for drawing them to my attention. These are of concern because the issue has been raised before and I asked that correspondence be sent by the Ministry of Defence and I understand that it was. So I am concerned that this has come back at what is clearly a critical time in these inquests.

I want to remind everyone that co-operation is key to my role. Also, as Mr Doran has pointed out, if people refuse to co-operate I have the power to subpoena witnesses. I can also draw an adverse inference if someone refuses to co-operate or furnish the court with

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evidence they may have in their possession. That has already been set out in correspondence but it is important that I put this fact on the record today.

It is also not permissible for people to discourage those who might have relevant information to come forward. As I have said I want to hear all of the evidence to make an informed decision about the very important issues that I have to decide as part and parcel of these inquests.

## NOTES TO EDITORS

This press release will be available on the Judiciary NI website (<https://judiciaryni.uk>).

**ENDS**

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