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**SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT: STATE COVER UP AND
CONCEALMENT OF THE LEGACY OF CONFLICT**

ADDRESS BY GERALDINE FINUCANE

THURSDAY, 11 FEBRUARY 2016

“Mr. Chairman, Fellow Speakers, Honoured Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured to be able to address you tonight, on the eve of the 27th anniversary of the murder of my husband, Patrick Finucane. As everyone is all too well aware by now, Pat was a Belfast solicitor, murdered by Loyalist paramilitaries in 1989, with the active assistance and participation of the RUC, the British Army and the British State.

It is clear that Britain bears a great deal of responsibility for what happened to many people killed during the conflict in Ireland. The magnitude of this responsibility seems now to be apparent to all, except the State itself. As a result of the work carried out by many organisations over many years, the extent to which many Government organs were involved in procuring, organising and facilitating the serial abuse of human rights in Ireland is now understood in a much more informed way.

However, I think it is true to say that, even in the midst of investigating so many cases of human rights abuses by Britain in Ireland over many years, the truth behind the murder of my husband still represents a genuinely shocking indictment. As a result of over 25 years campaigning, and with the assistance of many people around the world, we now know that Britain is guilty of colluding in the murder of an officer of its own courts. The sheer magnitude of this statement still invokes a feeling of near disbelief because, quite simply, it is true, and we have proved it.

What has been the British response to this? Nearly 27 years to the day have passed since Pat was murdered. It would be a testament to the character of the British State if its response in some way reflected the gravity of what was done. So what has been the reaction? How has Britain addressed its actions and sought to atone for them in the last three decades? Here is just one example.

In 2001, my family and I went to Downing Street to meet the then Prime Minister, Tony Blair. The former United Nations Special Rapporteur for the independence of judges and lawyers had just called for an independent public inquiry into Pat's murder and the continued harassment of defence lawyers in Northern Ireland. We went to Downing Street to discuss this finding by the UN and to ask Mr. Blair if he would establish the inquiry that had been recommended.

Whatever the personal view of the Prime Minister on the matter, it was undeniable that this was a serious case. It deserved serious consideration. *We* deserved serious consideration.

This is not how we were received by the Prime Minister. He didn't say much. His chief of staff did most of the talking. In fact, only for the fact that I had a photo taken with Mr. Blair in the meeting room, I'm not sure I would have believed he was there at all.

After the meeting, some weeks later, I received a letter from Mr. Blair. In it, he made a number of comments about Pat's case but most telling of all, he concluded the letter with this remark: *"I am not convinced that a public inquiry would find anything new."*

Two years later, in April 2003, the newly-appointed Commissioner of the London Metropolitan Police, John Stevens, announced the findings of his investigation. *His* concluding remarks went like this:

"My Enquiries have highlighted collusion, the wilful failure to keep records, the absence of accountability, the withholding of intelligence and evidence, and the extreme of agents being involved in murder. These serious acts and omissions have meant that people have been killed or seriously injured."

One year after this, in April 2004, the former Canadian Supreme Court Judge, Peter Cory, announced the findings of his investigation. The concluding paragraph of *his* report went like this:

“Some of the acts summarized ... are, in and of themselves, capable of constituting acts of collusion. Further, the documents and statements I have referred to in this review have a cumulative effect. Considered together, they clearly indicate to me that there is strong evidence that collusive acts were committed by the Army (FRU), the RUC SB and the Security Service. I am satisfied that there is a need for a public inquiry.”

In December 2012, the Prime Minister, David Cameron, addressed the House of Commons with a speech on the findings of a report by Sir Desmond de Silva, a barrister tasked with conducting a review of State papers dealing with collusion. The concluding part of Mr. Cameron’s speech went like this:

“The collusion demonstrated beyond any doubt..., which included the involvement of state agencies in murder, is totally unacceptable. We do not defend our security forces,...by trying to claim otherwise. Collusion should never, ever happen. So on behalf of the Government, and the whole country, let me say again to the Finucane family, I am deeply sorry.”

This outcome took eleven years and four visits to Downing Street to meet two different Prime Ministers. The phrase, “like pulling teeth”, doesn’t even come close! This is the response of the British State to the accusation of collusion: deny and hide. I think it is all too clear what that says about the character of those involved.

But the ironic thing is that what Tony Blair wrote to me all those years previously was exactly right: none of this was “*anything new*.” The information already existed. It was all there. They already knew about it. No great discoveries were made. It was just covered up and concealed for year after year until, eventually, it could not be contained any longer.

The De Silva Review was not the outcome I wanted. I am not satisfied with a mere review of the papers and a fairly meaningless, “we’re sorry”, even if it does come from the British Prime Minister. I just want the truth. I want it publicly, openly and independently.

I want to know, **why**. I want to know, **how**. I want to know, **who**. I want to ask my own questions and I want to hear the answers for myself. I want to read the documents and understand the frameworks. Most of all, I want to be able to show it to the entire world so that everyone can know and understand and learn what can be done in the name of the people by governments and states if we do not guard against it.

I also want the British State and its government - whatever the government or whomever the Prime minister – to accept their obligations with regard to the past in Ireland and the wrongs they have committed. In simple terms, I want what everyone who has lost a relative wants. Nothing will bring our loved ones back. They are gone forever but their legacy is not. It is in the name of that legacy that I and so many others ask for the one remaining thing that the British State can give us. The truth behind the killings. If they accept their responsibility in that then not only will they give us justice but they will also give our lost loves their well-deserved rest.

I would like to conclude these remarks by adding my personal welcome to our two guests this evening, Frank LaRue and Paul Seils. Both of whom have worked to advance the cause of human rights in general and in Guatemala particularly. Having guests from overseas reminds us that we are not the only place with problems relating to legacy issues and we are certainly not alone in the area of attacks on lawyers. In Guatemala and other parts of South America, including Brazil, Colombia, Honduras and Peru, lawyers continue to be threatened and harassed while doing their best to defend their clients. In 2015, in Argentina, a lawyer appointed as Special Prosecutor to investigate a 1994 bombing that killed 85 people, Alberto Nisman, was found dead in his home with a gunshot wound to the head. He was just hours away from giving public testimony that would have connected the government of the day to the bombing and a long-running scheme to cover up the truth. The official explanation for his death – suicide – has been vehemently rejected by his family.

These are the sorts of risks that lawyers around the world have taken and continue to take in the name of exposing the truth and not letting “the official version” become historical fact.

We should be grateful for the work of these brave men and women around the world and their efforts on behalf of those who desperately need their help. It is a great pleasure to have two such valiant people with us this evening.

Thank you very much.”