

The Government wishes to see that, as part of a comprehensive approach to dealing with the past, victims' families will receive additional information in relation to what happened to their loved ones.

We continue to encourage the NI parties to reach the necessary political agreement in relation to dealing with the past as well as the other issues so that these developments can be given practical effect. The Government will then be in a position to consider how best it can cooperate with any new institutions that may be established in Northern Ireland.

Whilst the outline of a framework for contending with the past was proposed in the context of the 31 December draft agreement, significant further work would be required before any new framework would be operational.

The proposals under consideration by the Northern Ireland parties envisage the establishment of a Historical Investigations Unit to take over the Troubles-related deaths cases currently within the remit of the PSNI's Historical Enquiries Team and the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland. It also proposes the establishment in Northern Ireland of an Independent Commission for Information Retrieval to enable families seek and receive privately information about conflict-related events. The Commission, after a period of time, could also assess the presence of certain patterns or themes across conflict-related cases.

Of course, these bodies would not have jurisdiction in the Irish State.

There may be intended implications in what the NI Parties set in place for Ireland which the Irish Government would have to consider very carefully in due course. In this regard, the Tánaiste has made clear the Government's commitment to playing an active and constructive role in dealing with the past – in encouraging Agreement on a new architecture for dealing with the Past to be agreed by the Northern Ireland Executive parties.