

The saga of Northern Ireland Troubles legislation continues in Parliament on Monday (27 April), following a statement by the NI Secretary Hilary Benn last week.

Mr Benn's written statement confirmed that the **Northern Ireland Troubles Bill** remains central to the Government's approach, describing it as an effort to finally address a long-standing failure to deal with the past. Nearly three decades after the Good Friday Agreement, successive attempts in London and in Belfast had not delivered a system capable of commanding confidence across victims, families and former security force personnel.

The Bill would enable information sharing by the Irish Government with the Legacies Commission.

The statement went on to say that '...unlike the false promise of the 2023 Legacy Act, the Troubles Bill does not offer immunity including for those who committed heinous acts of terrorism, and will be compliant with our Human Rights obligations, has been welcomed by all the main Northern Ireland political parties and indeed by many Operation Banner veterans.'

Crucially **the Bill does not provide immunity** for Troubles-related offences, in contrast to the [**Northern Ireland Troubles \(Legacy and Reconciliation\) Act 2023**](#). The 2023 Act, passed under the Sunak government, was to establish an Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery (ICRIR) and introduce a controversial conditional immunity scheme for Troubles-related offences

Mr Benn's statement does not introduce new policy so much as confirming the Government's settled direction for this legislation:

- The **2023 Act is effectively being dismantled**
- The replacement framework will centre on a **reformed Legacy Commission**
- The emphasis is on **information recovery and investigation without amnesty**

Alongside the statement, ministers have made clear that a substantial package of amendments is still to come.

The direction of travel is now reasonably clear, even if the full text has yet to be published. The Government is expected to focus on **procedural protections for veterans**, rather than any return to immunity. Likely elements include:

- Greater **anonymity protections** in proceedings
- Limits on compelling veterans to give evidence or be repeatedly questioned
- Measures aimed at preventing intrusive or unnecessary investigative approaches
- Additional safeguards reflecting the **age and welfare** of many veterans

There are also indications of further, as yet unpublished, provisions intended to provide "additional reassurance" to those who served.

In essence, the emerging model is one of no immunity, but enhanced procedural protection.

The gap: veterans' objections

These proposed changes have not, however, resolved the core concerns raised by many veterans' groups and individual veterans.

The principal objection is not about *process*, but about *principle*. Critics argue that:

- The Bill still allows for **investigation and potential prosecution**
- Procedural safeguards do little to prevent individuals being drawn into the system in the first place

From this perspective, protections are seen as assisting those already under scrutiny, rather than addressing what is viewed as the central problem: **the reopening of historic cases**.

A commonly articulated alternative is a much higher bar for any reinvestigation — for example, requiring **credible new evidence** before a case can proceed.

This concern has been voiced across parts of the veterans' community, including organisations such as the SAS Regimental Association, which in a letter to Labour MPs has responded to Mr Benn's statement.

The SAS Regimental Association's letter has been widely reported, but for ease of access we will provide it here.

What happens next?

The Government is expected to seek a 'carry-over motion' for the Northern Ireland Troubles Bill. This allows the Bill to continue into the next parliamentary session rather than falling at the end of the current session.

The vote is expected on **Monday** (27 April).

While such motions are often routine, in this case it matters because:

- The Bill is **controversial and incomplete**
- Significant **government amendments are still pending**
- The Bill's survival depends on continued parliamentary support at a rather sensitive political moment

If the motion failed to pass, the current legislative effort fails and the process would have to start again.

A system still in flux

Taken together, Benn's statement and the forthcoming parliamentary stage reinforce a broader point:

the UK's approach to legacy investigations remains in transition.

- The **old framework (2023 Act)** is politically and legally discredited or anyway, abandoned
- The **new framework (Troubles Bill)** is still incomplete and subject to amendment
- The **courts continue to shape what is legally permissible**

The Government's position is now clearer than it was—but the operational detail, and its real-world consequences, are not.

The immediate question is whether Parliament allows that system to proceed.

The more important question is whether (or how) what emerges can command confidence not only across communities in Northern Ireland, but also among those who served there.