

USE SPECIAL CRIMINAL COURT IN GANGLAND WAR - AGSI

18/12/2006

A call for the Special Criminal Court to be used in the fight against extreme gangland crime has been made by the Association of Garda Sergeants and Inspectors.

“It is now time to put the criminal justice system firmly on the side of victims and their families – like the families of Anthony Campbell and Alan Cunniffe – and to ensure that hardened criminals are put behind bars where they belong,” said the General Secretary of the AGSI, Mr Joe Dirwan.

Mr Dirwan pointed out that the Special Criminal Court had been successful in dealing with serious subversive criminals in the past. “Modern criminals have formed alliances with former subversives to terrorise communities. It is time for the criminal justice system to gear up and respond in a firm way in the defence of our society,” said Mr Dirwan. Criminals had no qualms about intimidating witnesses and subverting justice and the criminal justice system had to respond in the defence of citizens and victims.

Criminals also delay trials by getting bail, by automatically demanding trial by jury and by lodging complaints against prosecuting gardaí – measures must be taken to remove those weapons. “They do this to gain time to intimidate witnesses and to use interview tapes for a variety of purposes. The law should also have the facility to deny bail in very serious cases, again so that witnesses can be protected.”

“The Minister for Justice has said that he has an open cheque book, if that is so then it’s about time he signed a few cheques to improve our forensic science service – it now takes up to 50 days to get essential evidence back from the lab while gardaí must have a Book of Evidence available in 42 days. We are working with a clapped-out radio system for the past 10 years. We still have no DNA database. Garda stations in many cases – notably Finglas and Ballymun and Kevin Street – have

virtually no interview rooms and no rooms for case conferences. We cannot get phone records readily from phone companies, even in the case of hardened criminals. We are short 4,000 civilian support staff. There are no regional dog detection units and members are allowed no briefing time before going on duty.”

The AGSI has a long-standing request for a meeting with the Minister for Justice on these and other matters.