

# President of Irish Republican Shin Fein Paid Tribute to Lt.Col. Thileepan: TGTE

BELFAST, NORTHERN IRELAND, October 7, 2020 /EINPresswire.com/ --

Mr. Des Dalton, President of Irish Republican Shin Fein paid tribute to Lt. Col Thileepan during the memorial event organized by Transnational Government of Tamil Eelam (TGTE). Below, please find his presentation:

Just a few brief words on Bobby Sands and the 1981 Hunger Strike. Myself, I was nine years of age when I first heard of the hunger strike. And I was ten when Bobby Sands died on the 2nd hunger strike and it was an event that had a profound impact on myself, even at that young age. I remember even one instance attending a school play, where the school principal announced to all those in attendance as all of us stood for the Irish National Anthem that at that time, merely 100 miles away, young Irish men were currently in a British jail dying in a hunger strike. And I even remember at that age as we stood for the national anthem, those thoughts that were going through my head and that feeling. I still remember feeling those goosebumps. And all of those events, needless to say, particularly the death of Bobby Sands and his nine comrades had a profound effect on me and influenced my own political thinking. I came from a largely Republican household anyway and had developed a deep interest in Irish history but this event was seminal to me and my development.

From there, my own political interest continued to develop and grow as I entered my teenage years. I began to immerse myself more and more in Irish history and the current events falling around me which ultimately ended with me joining the Republicans and becoming a Republican activist. And so yes, the 1981 Hunger Strike was an event that had a huge effect in Ireland and it was one of those events that had a lasting impact.

I suppose that the struggle of Bobby Sands and his comrades was ultimately to deny the British's claim that this was not a political struggle and it was not a war of national liberation but rather one of criminal enterprise. And that was one of the things that motivated the British government to remove the political status of the Republic prisoners, to deny that they were political prisoners and deemed them criminals. By doing so, deeming the wider struggle- criminal and that of course was something that Bobby Sands and his comrades were not going to accept. There were previous hunger strikes in Ireland, going back to 1917 and a number of Irish Republican had died in the hunger strike for that same right of political status.

So in 1981 when Bobby Sands and his comrades embarked on a hunger strike, they knew very well that this was something that could likely lead to their deaths and sadly it did for 10 of them. And the political nature of the struggle was emphasized all the more by the election of Bobby Sands as a public representative and a parliamentary representative with over 30,000 votes in that famous bi-election in April 1981. And I emphasize that Sands was now the representative of the people and again underlining the fact that it was a political struggle. And they were political prisoners essentially. And that vindicated what they had been saying all along. Despite this, and despite the elections of Bobby Sands and the election of Kieran Doherty who was elected for County Down as a TD, as a parliamentary representative, these men were allowed to die in the hunger strike and this is one of the greatest crimes and one of the many crimes committed by the British government in our country in which they would allow even public representatives to die in hunger strikes. But despite that strike, ultimately the British government was forced to accept that these men were in fact political prisoners and political status was restored to the H blocks.

And so 1981 for that reason is so important and stands out as a marker in Irish history and one that politicized a whole generation of Irish people and also reminded them that British occupation of a part of that country was unfortunately not just history but, also a part of current reality, as indeed it remains till this day. There are still political prisoners in Ireland.

I would also like to extend solidarity to the Tamil people. It was always a struggle that was closely followed by the Irish Republicans over the years and over the decades. And it remains so to this day. Till date, we will certainly support the Tamil people and the right to national sovereignty and to independence and autonomy.

End.

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