

Revealed: 100 IRA terrorists who were told by police they will not be arrested are linked to THREE HUNDRED murders

- **Individuals got so-called 'comfort letters' from Government**
- **Notes were sent to 'on the runs' as reassurance they were no longer wanted**
- **Secret guarantees emerged after collapse of the Hyde Park bombing case**
- **Revelation threatens to reignite Loyalist anger in Northern Ireland**
- **Comes as family of IRA victim Jean McConville continue fight for justice**

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Almost 100 terror suspects linked to 295 murders were sent 'comfort letters' by the the Government reassuring them they were no longer wanted.

Northern Ireland's police chief Drew Harris told MPs 95 suspects linked to 200 killings received the letters. But the Police Service of Northern Ireland later clarified the true number of unsolved killings was closer to 300.

The revelation emerged during a Commons hearing today. One MP said the admission 'broke his heart'.



John Downey (pictured) was suspected of the IRA Hyde Park bombing. The case against him was dropped after he produced a 'comfort letter' sent to him by the Government

Mr Harris was giving evidence to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, which is holding an inquiry into the controversial on-the-run letters agreed between Sinn Fein and the last Labour government.

Under the deal letters were sent to about 190 Republican terror suspects informing them they were no longer wanted by the authorities in the UK.

The scheme was set up in the wake of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement - a cornerstone of the peace process.

But its existence only emerged after the collapse of a case against a man accused of the IRA's Hyde Park bomb in 1982 - an attack that killed four soldiers.

The prosecution of John Downey, 62, from Co Donegal, over the Hyde Park outrage was halted in February after a judge found he had been wrongly sent one of the letters, when in fact the Metropolitan Police were looking for him. Mr Downey denied involvement in the attack.



The 1982 Hyde Park bomb attack on the Household Cavalry killed four soldiers and seven horses

When the 228 'comfort letters' first emerged it sparked fury in Northern Ireland. There will be fears that today's revelation could reignite the row.

Mr Harris told MPs that some of the letters were sent to 'notorious' terrorists.

He said: 'When you look through the 228 names, there are people in that who are notorious, without a doubt'

He said 95 had been sent to murder investigation suspects.

'Ninety five of these individuals are linked in some way or other to 200 murder investigations,' he said.

After Mr Harris finished giving his evidence his force issued a statement of clarification that those 200 incidents actually involved the murder of 295 people.'

Northern Ireland MP Ian Paisley responded angrily to the revelation. He said: 'I must say, it breaks my heart today, as a citizen of Northern Ireland, as a citizen of the United Kingdom, 95 people are holding letters excusing the murder of 200 people. That breaks my heart.'

Mr Harris also revealed that five of the individuals who had received the letters were under active police investigation on the back of new evidence unearthed by Northern Ireland police's Historical Enquiries Team.

He said he did not know if the letters would scupper these probes.

The Northern Ireland police chief said: 'I don't know whether they will be annulled or not.'



Northern Ireland MP Ian Paisley Jnr reacted angrily to the revelation that 95 letters were sent to suspects wanted in 200 murder probes

Today's bombshell revelation came after the children of IRA murder victim Jean McConville vowed to continue fighting for justice as they gathered to mark what would have been her 80th birthday.

Relatives planted a tree and released doves into the air during a poignant ceremony of music and prayer at a victims' support centre in north Belfast.

The event was held as police announced that a 56-year-old man had been re-arrested in connection with the notorious 1972 abduction and killing of the Belfast mother-of-ten.

The suspect was originally detained by officers last month but the interview process was halted due to a medical issue arising.

Seven people have been arrested and questioned in the last two months in connection with the murder - including Sinn Fein president Gerry Adams.

Mr Adams, 65, was released on Sunday without charge after four days in police custody. A police file is to be passed to prosecutors to determine whether any charges will be pursued. Mr Adams vehemently denies any involvement in the crime.

After the remembrance event at the Wave Trauma Centre, Mrs McConville's son Michael said the last week had proved very stressful for the family.

'We know it's going to be a long road to try and get justice for our mother, we know all these events when they take place we know we are going to go through a hard time,' said Mr McConville.

'We have been backed into a corner by the IRA and we are going to come out fighting and we want justice for our mother.'

Mrs McConville, a 37-year-old widow, was dragged, screaming, away from her children in the Divis flats in west

5/8/2014

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Belfast by a gang of up to 12 men and women after being wrongly accused of informing to the security forces.

She was interrogated, shot in the back of the head and then secretly buried - becoming one of the 'Disappeared' victims of the Troubles. Her body was not found until 2003 on a beach in Co Louth, 50 miles from her home.

Families of Disappeared victims whose remains have yet to be discovered joined members of the McConville family at today's event.