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## Northern Ireland Human Rights Body Faces Backlash Over Silence on Chief's Remarks

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The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) is facing mounting criticism after remaining silent over controversial comments made by its Chief Commissioner, Alyson Kilpatrick. Her remarks, questioning the impartiality of a former Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) officer now working with a legacy investigation body, have raised concerns about the Commission's political neutrality and its ability to uphold the principles of equal opportunity.

Kilpatrick publicly challenged the appointment of Peter Sheridan as lead investigator for the Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery (ICRIR), arguing that his previous affiliation with the RUC compromises the Commission's independence. The ICRIR is tasked with overseeing investigations related to unresolved incidents from Northern Ireland's past. Her comments were interpreted by some as politically charged and dismissive of an individual's qualifications based solely on their professional history.

The NIHRC, whose mandate is to ensure human rights are protected across Northern Ireland, declined to answer media questions following Kilpatrick's remarks, stating that an official statement would be issued later in the week. This silence has only intensified criticism from political figures and observers who view the lack of immediate clarification as a sign of internal disarray or, at worst, ideological bias.

Doug Beattie, Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) for Upper Bann and Justice spokesperson for the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), expressed concern over the Chief Commissioner's remarks. "The NIHRC's role is to uphold equality, which includes equal access to employment. If the Commission supports these comments, it needs to reassess its purpose," Beattie told the *News Letter*.

Jim Allister, Member of Parliament (MP) for North Antrim and leader of the Traditional Unionist Voice (TUV), echoed these concerns. He questioned whether the Commission's silence was due to internal disagreement or discomfort over Kilpatrick's statements. "The broader Commission has gone to ground. One must ask if this silence reflects internal unease or even embarrassment," Allister said. He added that it was "damaging" for a taxpayer-funded body to appear to advance what he described as a politically motivated agenda.

Critics argue that dismissing someone's eligibility based on their previous service in the RUC undermines fairness and the principles of merit-based recruitment. They warn that the NIHRC risks losing credibility if it allows political leanings to influence its stance on appointments tied to sensitive legacy matters.

As the public awaits the Commission's formal response, the controversy has sparked a wider conversation about impartiality within public institutions. At the heart of the issue is whether the NIHRC remains committed to equal rights for all, regardless of background, or if it is being steered by narrower ideological interests.