

# Judith Thompson

Appointed by Northern Ireland's first and Deputy First Ministers Judith served as the Commissioner for Victims and Survivors of Northern Ireland's troubled past from 2015 to 20. Judith's commitment to promoting the interests of victims and survivors of conflict and trauma is based on more than 30 years working within justice organisations and in communities.

A willingness to listen and ability to bring people together marked her tenure and played a critical role in shaping her advice to Government. Appointing and Chairing the Victims and Survivors Forum, to put those who experienced harm at the centre of all the Commission's work, Judith nurtured a culture where strong relationships have been built between members with very diverse and often opposing experiences.

Judith's advice to Government enabled significant improvements for victims and survivors. The long-standing campaign for a victims' payment was enshrined in legislation, a new needs-based approach to services for victims and survivors was introduced, and a regional trauma network to address the mental health legacy of the conflict was developed.

She has built links internationally, where she is recognised as an advocate of victims and survivors in post-conflict societies. Judith has been part of peace negotiations in Afghanistan, visited Bosnia and hosted numerous delegations from other nations affected by conflict. She continues to be an active member of INVICTIM; an international network of leaders in protecting and supporting victims. She is also a member of the group of internationally recognised experts in the field of human rights and victim support who advise Operation Kenova on all matters relating to victims.

From 2004 until 2015 Judith led the work of the UK's licensed Sector Skills Council for Justice in Northern Ireland and Scotland, working with Justice and community organisations to develop skills and improve practice. As changes to the justice system were brought about by peace in Northern Ireland, she worked closely with the Police Service to support police reform and was responsible for setting standards for work with victims and survivors and for building safer communities. She remains passionate about building skills and is a member of the Governing Body of the Southern Regional College.

Originally from Manchester, Judith completed her degree in Economics and Social Sciences at the University of Manchester and a Masters in Social Work at the University of Leicester before coming to Northern Ireland in 1984. Her first job was as a probation officer in North Belfast, where she worked with victims and offenders on both sides of the many 'peace lines'. She supported people experiencing violence, intimidation, domestic and sexual abuse in a community deeply affected by conflict and saw the hardship facing women who often held both families and communities together.

These experiences gave Judith a deep understanding of the complex narratives that underly conflict and the impact that violence has on families and communities. They have stayed with her throughout her 36 years of working in the justice sector

Having the privilege of hearing people's views and experiences has been a highlight of her time in office, both personally and in terms of progress towards a real and lasting peace; "Peace is evidenced by people coming into the room and staying there, opening up dialogue rather than closing it down because they disagree."

Judith lives in Co. Down. She enjoys running, swimming and walking her dogs along the shoreline of Strangford Lough. She is married and has two grown-up daughters.