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THIRTY YEARS OF WAITING: BEREAVED FAMILIES LAUNCH THE CHINOOK JUSTICE CAMPAIGN

This weekend marks thirty years since the fatal crash of a Royal Air Force Chinook helicopter on the Mull of Kintyre, Scotland, on 2nd June 1994. The crash of the RAF Mark 2 Chinook – serial number ZD 576 – resulted in the deaths of all twenty-five passengers and four crew on board. There were no survivors. The passengers included experts from the Security Services, the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the British Army. On board were the majority of the UK’s senior Northern Ireland intelligence and counter-terrorism experts at the time. It remains one of the RAF’s worst ever peacetime disasters.

Today, Friday 31st May 2024, to mark the anniversary, sixteen bereaved families announce that they have joined together to form the **Chinook Justice Campaign**. The Chinook Justice Campaign seeks access and answers: access to all the key documents, and answers about their loved ones’ deaths.

After thirty years, the families of those who tragically lost their lives are still searching for answers about what happened to their loved ones. Although there have been a number of investigations and processes since 1994, many fundamental questions remain unanswered for the bereaved families. The two dead pilots, Flight Lieutenants Richard Cook and Jonathan Tapper, were wrongly accused of gross negligence. It was only after a 17-year campaign for justice by the pilots’ families that the UK Government finally overturned the verdict.

The circumstances of the crash and the investigations that followed it have recently been depicted in a two-part BBC documentary ‘Chinook: Zulu Delta 576’, available on BBC iPlayer. It was from this documentary, rather than any official communication, that many families of those who died found out that official documents related to the crash have been sealed by the UK Government for 100 years, until 2094.

Explaining the importance of the Chinook Justice Campaign, **Matthew Tobias**, son of Lieutenant Colonel John Tobias MBE who was killed in the crash, said:

“I was only a child when my father died in June 1994. In the 30 years since, there have been subsequent inquiries that have not fully answered our concerns around what happened on that night and why, which have led to many unanswered questions.

“It is shocking that key papers have been sealed until 2094, when all bereaved family members are unlikely to still be alive to see them. The Chinook Justice Campaign has been formed so that the families can work together to secure answers we have been awaiting for three decades.”

Matthew Tobias was aged ten when his father was killed. He is now 40.

The Chinook Justice Campaign has appointed a legal team at Howard Kennedy and Doughty Street Chambers, headed by solicitor Mark Stephens CBE of Howard Kennedy and barrister Caoilfhionn Gallagher KC of Doughty Street Chambers, working with barristers Jonathan Price and Sam Jacobs and solicitor Tim Bignell.

Welcoming the new campaign, **Mark Stephens CBE** said:

“As anyone who suffers a bereavement will know, having answers as to how your loved ones have died is a basic human need, and that is why the law enshrines that right. But in this outlier of a case the families have been denied the solace that comes with understanding. 30 years on the families have not had their right to answers that will allow them to begin to heal. The injustice they have endured has now been passed to the children of the deceased who - 30 years on - still don't know why or how their parents met their end.

“In the absence of proper explanations, conspiracy theories and disinformation have filled the vacuum, only causing further anguish and pain from speculation. As is their legal entitlement the families want and deserve accurate facts to fill the void currently filled by speculation. There has so far been no full review of the facts and circumstances leading to these deaths. After so long they deserve the information to which the law entitles them.”

Caoilfhionn Gallagher KC added:

“All too often we see bereaved families and victims of injustice left for decades without answers to fundamental questions about what went wrong and why: the Hillsborough Disaster, the Stardust Fire, the Post Office Scandal, the Infected Blood Inquiry. Thirty years ago, on 2nd June 1994, 29 people went to work and never came home to their families. The processes which have

taken place since – including the RAF Board of Inquiry, the Fatal Accident Inquiry in Scotland and the Mull of Kintyre Review chaired by Lord Philip – have only managed to establish what did not happen, not what did happen, and why. There has never been an independent, effective investigation, open to public scrutiny and with the bereaved families' meaningful involvement, which establishes answers to basic questions such as what was known prior to the crash as to the safety of the Mark 2 Chinook. And now the key documents have been sealed away for a century, until 2094.

“The loss of a loved one is devastating in any circumstances, but when it is an unexpected death, followed by decades of unanswered questions, and a lack of transparency, it compounds the grief and distress of the bereaved, and simply adds to the unanswered questions. It is long past time to give the families what they seek: access to the documents, and answers. The Chinook Justice Campaign will be seeking the release of the sealed documents as a priority after the General Election. Whoever is in Number 10 Downing Street next month, we urge them to finally do the right thing by these families and by the 29 victims who dedicated their lives to serving their country.”

Anyone affected by the crash who wishes to join the Chinook Justice Campaign, or learn more about it, is welcome to contact Mark Stephens CBE and Tim Bignell, Howard Kennedy at chinookjustice@howardkennedy.com, or Mark Stephens CBE by mobile at +44 783111 5000.

We ask that the privacy of the bereaved families is respected and that any press queries about the Chinook Justice Campaign are directed to chinookjustice@howardkennedy.com or Mark Stephens CBE by mobile at +44 783111 5000.

The Chinook Justice Campaign is dedicated to the memory of the passengers and crew of ZD576:

Richard Allen
Christopher John Biles
Dennis Stanley Bunting
Desmond Patrick Conroy
Richard David Cook
Martin George Dalton
Philip George Davidson
Stephen Davidson
John Robert Deverell

Christopher John Dockerty
John Charles Brian Fitzsimons
Graham William Forbes
Robert Patrick Foster
Richard Lawrence Gregory-Smith
William Rutherford Gwilliam
Kevin Andrew Hardie
John Stuart Haynes
Anthony Robert Hornby
Anne Catherine James
Kevin Michael Magee
Michael Bruce Maltby
Maurice McLaughlin Neilly
John Turbitt Phoenix
Roy Pugh
Stephen Lewis Rickard
Gary Paul Sparks
Jonathan Paul Tapper
John Tobias
George Victor Alexander Williams

ENDS

Notes to Editors:

1. The Chinook Justice Campaign is a newly formed alliance of bereaved families, working together given their shared concerns and quest for access to documents and answers about the tragedy. They can be contacted directly at chinookjustice@gmail.com, and their legal team can be contacted at chinookjustice@howardkennedy.com or +44 783111 5000.
2. There have been a number of investigations/ inquiries since 1994, including:
 - (i) An initial RAF Board of Inquiry, following which two Air Chief Marshalls concluded that the crash had been caused by the gross negligence of the two pilots – a conclusion which did not appear to follow from the Board of Inquiry report. Over subsequent years, serious concerns emerged as to the safety and reliability of the Mark 2 Chinook,

and whether those concerns had been adequately considered in examining the probable causes of the crash;

- (ii) A Fatal Accident Inquiry in Scotland disputed that a finding could be made of gross negligence;
 - (iii) A campaign by the families of the two pilots resulted, ultimately, in the Secretary of State for Defence, Dr Liam Fox, announcing on 16th September 2010 that he had appointed Lord Philip and three Privy Counsellors to “*examine all available evidence relating to the findings of the Board of Inquiry.*” The review reported in July 2011, recommending that the finding that the pilots were negligent to a gross degree should be set aside. This was acted upon by the Defence Council and the Defence Secretary issued an apology to the families of the pilots.
3. More information about the Chinook Justice Campaign will be released in the coming months by the legal team and via X, at @ChinookJustice, and using the hashtag #ChinookJustice.