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Dr. Myra Cullinane
Dublin District Coroner
Coroner's Court
Store Street
Dublin 1

Our Ref: 2018/01911
2018/06944

19th December 2019

Re: Stardust - Request for new Inquests

Dear Dr. Cullinane,

I refer to my letter dated the 25th September 2019 setting out my decision to direct the holding of fresh Inquests into the deaths in the fire at the Stardust disco in Artane, Dublin, on the 14th February 1981.

In communicating my decision I mentioned that I would in early course set out in more detail the reasons for the decision, and I do so now.

The background to this matter can be summarised as follows. In the early hours of the 14th of February, 1981 a catastrophic fire swept through the Stardust Ballroom in Artane, Dublin killing 48 people and causing serious injury to 128 others. The overwhelming majority of the victims were in the age group of 18-25 and came from the neighbouring areas of Artane, Kilmore and Greater Coolock. The scale and horror of the tragedy was such that it was and remains the greatest such disaster to have occurred in the history of the State.

Inquests into the deaths were held, and the Inquests took place over the 5 days Monday 1st March 1982 to Friday 5th March 1982 inclusive. In respect of every one of the 48 Stardust deaths an Inquest verdict was recorded in accordance with the medical evidence.

The findings at the original Inquests were confined to a statement of the proximate medical cause of death in respect of each of the deceased. There was no reference to the surrounding circumstances, in particular the cause or causes of the fire, and it does not appear that questions as to the cause or causes of the fire were canvassed to a sufficient degree, if indeed at all, at the original Inquests. I therefore consider that in the original Inquests there was an insufficiency of Inquiry as to how the deaths occurred.

Section 24 of the Coroners Act 1962 provides that where the Attorney General has reason to believe that a person has died in circumstances which in his opinion make the holding of an Inquest advisable he may direct any coroner to hold an Inquest. This means that even if the

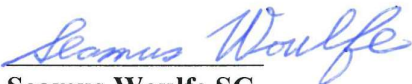
Attorney General considers that there was an insufficiency of inquiry at the original Inquests, he or she will still have a discretion as to whether or not to direct that a fresh Inquest be held.

In this instance I am satisfied that the holding of fresh Inquests is on balance advisable. After careful consideration, I decided to exercise my discretion in favour of directing that further Inquests be held. I consider this to be in the public interest and in the interests of justice. Drawing on analogies with the Hillsborough case in England, my view is that where there is a disaster of such magnitude as that which occurred at the Stardust in February 1981 there is, in the first place, the entitlement of the families of the victims to the public revelation of the facts, but also a distinct and separate imperative that the community as a whole should be satisfied, even if belatedly, that there be sufficient inquiry at any Inquest held to maximise the chances that the truth should emerge. This would in addition endeavour to serve the further public interest grounds, well established in law, of allaying rumours and suspicion, and of drawing attention to the existence of circumstances which, if unremedied, might lead to further deaths.

I did, however, have regard to considerations pointing towards exercising my discretion so as not to direct that further Inquests be held. These include the considerable passage of time, the possible unavailability of certain relevant evidence, and doubts about whether fresh Inquests will now be able to ascertain the cause or causes of the fire, given that other investigations to date appear to have been unsuccessful in that regard.

On balance, however, and for the detailed reasons set out above, I am satisfied that fresh Inquests should be held and I have written to you today under separate cover with my direction.

Yours sincerely,



Seamus Woulfe SC
Attorney General