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## NORTHERN IRELAND Information Service

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### SECRETARY OF STATE LAUNCHES CODE OF PRACTICE FOR VICTIMS OF CRIME

Victims of crime too often in the past felt ignored and neglected by a criminal justice system that did not always consider their needs, the Secretary of State the Rt Hon Dr Marjorie Mowlam MP said today.

"However that has changed in recent years and the importance of protecting victims and properly addressing their needs is now fully realised and accepted," she added.

"This Government has a strong commitment to supporting victims of crime and the development of this code is the first step in the process.

"Much more work needs to be done to identify the needs of victims and to take steps to meet those needs."

The Secretary of State was speaking at the launch of a Code of Practice for Victims of Crime in the Linenhall Library in Belfast.

The Code of Practice - for all victims of crime in Northern Ireland- explains how a victim can expect to be treated during contact with the criminal justice system.

It has been drafted by a Victims Steering Group, comprising senior representatives of the criminal justice agencies and the voluntary organisation Victim Support Northern Ireland.

Launched during Victim Support Week, it describes the services available within the criminal justice sector and explains how individual agencies are to be measured against agreed standards.

The Secretary of State paid tribute to the voluntary agencies that help victims - in particular Victim Support Northern Ireland - which she described as an "essential element" in the provision of services.

"The Government values your contribution," she added.

"We now need to work very hard to change the perception that victims are not properly attended to by the criminal justice system and that their needs are secondary to the needs of offenders."