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Sunday, February 18, 2007  
 By Stephen Breen  
 The heartbroken mum of a missing Co Down man last night said she

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believed her son could have been found if members of the PSNI diving team had not been suspended.

Karen Kelly - whose son Martin went missing on New Year's Day 2006 - also said her family should not have had to wait six weeks before underwater searches were carried out to find the young man.

Mrs Kelly (50), who remains determined to find Martin, spoke out after we revealed that the PSNI's crack Underwater Search Unit has been out of action since January 2006, when it was rocked by disciplinary moves involving three of its six divers.

The trio were suspended and two more volunteers - both constables - withdrew their services as differences between divers and management came to a head.

Mrs Kelly said it was "essential" for the police to have a full-time diving team.

She said: "This country is surrounded by water but we must be the only place in Europe that does not have a 24/7 police diving team.

"When Martin went missing they told me that if he was in the water they would have to wait six weeks for his body to float, and that's why there was no search.

"We thought he might have been in a part of the Lagan close to Sydenham but we had to get overseas divers to do a search.

"If there had been a full-time police diving team working when my son went missing then our anguish might have ended.

"I would hate any mother to go through what we have been through.

That's why we need to get this full-time diving team sooner rather than later."

Martin went missing after New Year drinks with friends in Pat's Bar in Belfast's Docks area.

He left the pub and CCTV footage showed him walking towards the Prudential Building at Clarendon Dock around 7.15pm. He has not been seen since.

Karen has searched relentlessly for her son. Last July her hunt took her on a month-long trek around the UK.

Karen described the year since Martin disappeared as "hell".

"At times it just seems like yesterday that I was talking to Martin and other times I feel that I'm not even alive, that I've died and I'm just living



this limbo of a hell.

"We just want to create awareness that he is still missing and get the tiniest bit of information that can lead to us finding Martin.

"There's maybe very little hope, but there is still a chance that we will find him."

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