

Coretta King takes plea to Clinton

He'll weigh his options on assassination panel

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WASHINGTON—President Clinton told the widow of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. on Tuesday that he would “see what his options are” concerning her request that he appoint a commission to take a new look at King’s 1968 assassination.

Coretta Scott King, accompanied by three of her children, came away from their White House meeting with no commitment that Clinton would appoint a panel. But she said she felt comfortable with that and is willing to allow him time to come up with a response.

“I understand he has to do that,” King said. “We wouldn’t respect him as a leader if he made all those kinds of decisions without any consultations.”

White House spokesman Barry Toiv said Clinton made no firm decisions Tuesday because he is waiting for the Justice Department’s review of the family’s

request and for advice from White House lawyers on how he should proceed.

“Emotionally, he was moved by the feelings that [King] expressed,” said Toiv, “and he is looking forward to getting a recommendation from the Justice Department.”

King, along with her children—Bernice, Dexter and Martin III—spent 40 minutes in the Oval Office with Clinton, explaining 30 years of pain over the loss of their husband and father. They also told Clinton they believe James Earl Ray, who pleaded guilty to killing King, did not act alone.

“Each one of us did speak about our feelings . . . that we tried to ignore this for years, but it wouldn’t go away,” King said. “It’s difficult for me to appreciate the fact that one lone person could engineer what he did in terms of his escape, and what I know about him not being a good shooter. We want to know the truth.”

She said that her family decided to ask that a commission investigate because they have gotten numerous calls and letters from people “who wish to come out if

they are given immunity.”

They want a panel modeled after South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which can grant amnesty and immunity from prosecution to people who testify about crimes committed under apartheid.

“We think that, if people had a mechanism they trusted, they would come forward and state what they know,” King said.

Clinton spoke with the family by telephone earlier this year and King met with Atty. Gen. Janet Reno in April about their request.

Civil rights activist Jesse Jackson, who was with King when he was shot, said that he agrees with the family’s quest and has told Clinton of his own feeling that the probe should continue because rumors persist among black Americans that King was the victim of a government conspiracy.

Ray confessed to shooting King as he stood on the balcony of a Memphis hotel April 4, 1968. But Ray recanted three days later and maintained his innocence until his death two months ago while serving a 99-year prison term.