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Viewpoint: Process must not be derailed

Monday, 9 March 2009

The murder of two soldiers at Antrim and the serious injury caused to other people at the weekend must be condemned by people from all sides, and in the strongest possible terms. This was a savage reminder of the potential for violence that can still surface in our community, and is a backward step towards the worst of the past.

Senior politicians, church and community leaders across the board have expressed their shock at such an outrage. The Prime Minister caught the public mood when he said: "No murderer will be able to derail a peace process that has the support of the great majority of Northern Ireland."

The Northern Ireland Secretary Shaun Woodward, who has been working hard (and with difficulty) to further that peace process, said rightly that the Antrim shooting was "an act of criminal barbarism". The Presbyterian Moderator said that the incident "takes us back to events which we thought we had left in the past".

However bad the past has been, the shadow of the

gunman must not be allowed to hover over the present, and the brighter future for Northern Ireland and all its people.

The political progress has been patchy since the Good Friday Agreement, but the Stormont parties and politicians, with all their faults, have been trying to make it work. This process must not be derailed.

The tragedy is that any individual or groups of people, whatever their motives, continue to believe that violence provides a way towards the establishment of permanent peace on this island. The intense suffering of the people from all communities for

nearly four decades has shown the self-defeating emptiness of violence and the stupidity and savagery of those who think it provides an answer.

A great challenge now faces the politicians from all our parties. Prior to this dreadful weekend, there had been a typical political row between representatives of unionism and nationalism about the decision of the Chief Constable to deploy a small number of "special forces" in the fight against republican dissidents.

Sir Hugh Orde might have shared this development more tactfully, but the weekend events have proved, tragically, that he was right in his assessment

of the need for special help.

This is a time for the politicians to avoid further wrangling and to stand together firmly in the continued search for a permanent peace. Sir Hugh Orde has been warning for weeks about the possibility of such an incident, and the possibility of further acts of violence cannot be ruled out.

The politicians and the people they represent have much at stake and the peace process in Northern Ireland is still fragile as the Antrim shooting has so callously demonstrated. Those who resort to guns to kill and seriously wound other human beings cannot and will not be allowed to destroy the peace process.

This is a time for resolution and clear thinking. It is also a time for anyone with the slightest information to contact the security forces so that those people guilty of murder and wounding can be brought to justice. This is not a time for points-scoring, but for action, and also for the resolve to build a better future, based on the rule of law. We are all in this together.

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Very well said I'd like to send my sympathy to the families of the Soulders killed and the others who were wounded. This must not be allowed to take over again we're going forward not back.

Posted by Kerry | 09.03.09, 18:34 GMT

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