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## Peter Robinson: We can't go back

As Northern Ireland comes to terms with the murder of two young soldiers in Antrim, First Minister Peter Robinson vows that the killers will not plunge the province into turmoil again

Tuesday, 10 March 2009

Today, as I travel to the United States of America, a dark shadow hangs over our province.

On Saturday evening, while in the rest of Northern Ireland people were getting on with their lives, evil men claiming to represent the Real IRA brutally murdered two young men and tried to kill many others. In doing so, they threw down a challenge to all of us. It is a challenge not just to the Assembly and its Executive but to those we collectively represent.

The two murdered soldiers, Sapper Mark Quinsey (23), from Birmingham, and Sapper Cengiz Azimkar (21), from London, were callously gunned down just hours before they were due to leave Northern Ireland to serve in Afghanistan.

They were off duty, unarmed, and shot as they went to collect pizzas at the gates of the Massereene Army Base. Two other soldiers were injured in this horrific attack. But the same gunmen then, cold bloodedly, turned their weapons on the civilian pizza delivery men. We extend our condolences to the sorrowing families and pray that the Lord might comfort them at this tragic time.

One of the injured civilians was a local man — 19-year-old, Anthony Watson, the other was a young man from Poland who had come here in search of a better life.

I know the people of Northern Ireland will prayerfully uphold all the innocent victims of this terrorist attack in the days and weeks ahead.

No words of ours can ease the pain and devastation which has been brought to these families, but as First Minister I want, on behalf of the people of Northern Ireland, to offer our deepest sympathy for the loss that has been suffered.

There is no cause that can justify these actions. No goal will be achieved. The killers will not win. This was a futile act and a terrible waste. The contrast between those brave soldiers and the wicked murderers could not be more stark.

The soldiers who fell at the Massereene base will be remembered with honour and pride — their killers and their cause will live with the shame and be viewed with contempt and loathing.



Today, and in the time ahead, we have a decision to take as a community. The choice is clear and will determine our future as a people.

At the weekend we saw in bold a terrible reminder of what we left behind. It was an act intended to divide us. It was calculated as a means to raise fear and hatred and planned to cause us to stumble. It was designed to force us to turn back.

This is not a time to raise the flag of narrow interests. It is a time for every corner of our community to unite in condemnation, and resolve that these people will never win — that we will not be diverted from the course which we have set.

What we have is far from perfect. What we have at Stormont is often difficult to operate. Many differences between our traditions remain but it is here — here in this Assembly — that we will work to resolve our problems. The events of Saturday evening were a throwback to a previous era. We must never return to such terrible days.

As a people we can defeat the murder gangs by refusing to be dragged back to the bad and bloody days of the past. In the face of the tragedy that these events have brought, silence and disengagement are not options. If we want to rid our society of violence and division then the struggle for all of us continues every single day.

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We offer the Chief Constable and those who serve with him the support they require in order to do their job and to bring the killers to justice. But the responsibility to bring these people to justice does not fall to the PSNI alone; it is a duty on every single citizen in this province. The police can only be effective with the support and co-operation of the wider community.

The continued existence of our Assembly at Stormont will stand as evidence of the failure of this murderous campaign. But the Assembly only exists with the consent and support of the community.

In the aftermath of this terrible incident, we are being tested. Yet, we should remember that our future is not dependent on the evil of those who seek to destroy our society but rather it depends on the good that is found in those throughout our community who want to build a stable, peaceful, democratic and shared society.

As I travel to the United States of America, I do so in the knowledge that we must re-double our efforts to promote Northern Ireland as a good place to live, work and do business.

By promoting our potential we can demonstrate the desire of the vast majority in Northern Ireland to build a brighter and more successful future for everyone.

This is a moment of truth for us all. We have a choice to make. On Saturday night the challenge was issued. Let the answer be loud and clear. We are not turning back.



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