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“Innocent people” comment is welcomed by victims’ families

Orde outlines limited circumstances in which plastic bullets can be used

Andersonstown News

Damian McCarney

15/01/2007

Bereaved relatives of people killed by plastic and rubber bullets welcomed the Chief Constable’s admission that the weapons were responsible for killing “innocent people including children”.

Hugh Orde made his comments as he outlined the limited circumstances in which the baton rounds, referred to as AEPs

(Attenuated Energy Projectiles) could be used, which brings the guidelines for their use in line with those for England and Wales. However he stopped short of totally rejecting the use of baton rounds.

“The government,” said Hugh Orde, “is fully committed to implementing the Patten recommendations on baton rounds. We have no desire to use these rounds again. The Attenuating Energy Projectile will not be used for the purposes of public order/crowd control but only in response to an individual or individuals threatening violence where the only alternative would be the use of live rounds, following the same rules as in England and Wales. Research on a further alternative continues.

“It is fully acknowledged that this has not always been the case in the past and that a number of innocent people including children have been killed and injured by plastic and rubber bullets, and that for them and their families this is and will always be a burning issue. I cannot change the past, but we all need to work to ensure that such situations are never again repeated.”

From their introduction in 1970 to 2005 almost 126,000 rubber and plastic bullets were fired, killing 17 people, including nine children. In 1981 alone the RUC fired almost 30,000 plastic bullets, killing seven people, three of whom were children and thousands more were injured.

Relatives for Justice and the United Campaign Against Plastic Bullets Chairperson Clara Reilly described Hugh Orde’s comments as a “very



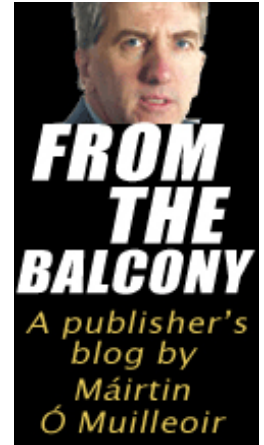
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welcome and significant development”.

“While acknowledgement of innocence had been recognised in some courts no one representing the RUC/PSNI, the British army or the British government has until now acknowledged the hurt and pain caused by these weapons.

“This lack of acknowledgement compounded the pain of these families who have bravely and relentlessly campaigned for truth and justice for their loved ones and whose experience until now was dismissed and ignored.” Ms Reilly continued by saying that it was “highly regrettable” that the Chief Constable did not take this opportunity to completely end the use of baton rounds.

“These weapons were not designed to be used in crowd control situations, therefore we need this to be further clarified in light of the current guidelines, which are already supposed to be adhered to in the deployment of plastic bullets.

“Much more needs to be said and done by the PSNI, Policing Board, British army and British government. Victims and families need the full truth and, as required by the UN and other international human rights bodies, there must be a complete ban on these weapons.”

Clara Reilly said that Hugh Orde’s comments were only the first step in addressing the legacy of impunity that surrounds these killings.

“We now need the full truth about all of these killings. This will establish exactly what happened, hold those responsible for the crimes accountable and thereby allow for healing and recovery.

“We recognise that there are many other families also bereaved and injured by state violence and from across our society who need similar acknowledgement. Both governments must now move swiftly to put in place processes for acknowledgement and truth recovery for everyone. The lessons must be learned from the terrible legacy of our conflict, only full acknowledgement and truth can secure this.”

Sinn Féin Assembly member Mitchel McLaughlin echoed Ms Reilly’s call for a total ban on plastic bullets.

“The purchase of plastic bullets by the Policing Board in recent years is an explicit approval of their use.

“Sinn Féin has recently held a number of meetings with PSNI Chief Constable Hugh Orde specifically on the issue of plastic bullets. We welcome the commitment not to use these weapons in crowd control or public order situations. Hugh Orde’s acknowledgement of the hurt resulting from injuries and deaths of innocent people, including children, is also welcome. These weapons should never be used again.”

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