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Martin McGuinness address to Derry Volunteers Commemoration

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Sinn Féin MP and Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness today addressed the annual Derry Volunteers Commemoration. During the course of his speech Mr McGuinness referred to the brutal murder of Emmett Shields in the city this week and he had a clear message for those small micro groups still involved in violence.

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Mr McGuinness said:

"These groups should listen to the voice of the people, as was witnessed here on Tuesday night, pack up and go away. We have now come to a point of no return. These people now have choices to make. These small groups have reached a fork in the road. For them the choice is clear, choose the peaceful and democratic road to a United Ireland - which is open to them - or they can choose to go down some sort of quasi-military cul-de-sac. There is no room for grey areas any longer." ENDS

Full text of Martin McGuinness address:

Derry Commemoration 2008 - Martin McGuinness

"We have gathered here in great numbers today in the first instance to pay tribute to the fallen IRA Volunteers and Sinn Féin activists who paid the ultimate price in pursuit of freedom and democracy on this island in the course of the past 35 years and more, and to offer our ongoing support and solidarity to their families who have joined with us here today.

This year marks the 35th Anniversary of the death of Vol Joe Walker, and the 30th anniversaries of Vol. Denis Heaney, Vol. Patsy Duffy and Vol. Pat Harkin. Along with the other Volunteers of the Derry brigade of Oglaiha na hÉireann buried here in this Cemetery Joe, Denis, and Patsy killed on active service and Pat - who died while on the run in Donegal - paid the ultimate sacrifice so that the people of this city and the rest of Ireland could live in freedom, justice and peace. Thousands of their comrades spent many years in prisons the length and breadth of Ireland and beyond as members of the most formidable peoples army in the world. We are continuing the work to achieve the primary goal for which they fought and died. It is my firm belief that we now have a framework in which to build that republic without any more of our young men and women losing their lives or spending the best years of their lives in prison.

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The families of our patriot dead and indeed the wider republican family in this city are justifiably proud of the contribution, which Derry has made in the struggle for Irish freedom. Since the late 1960s when the Civil Rights Movement emerged onto these streets - the people of this city have been to the forefront in demanding our rights and entitlements. The resilience - the dedication and the determination of Republicans in this city has truly been inspirational.

At a time when it was needed and at great personal sacrifice to themselves men and women across this city joined the republican struggle and changed the course of history forever.

When I joined the IRA in this city it was an army of the people - sustained by the people - supported by the people - and answerable to the people.

That is why the IRA became the formidable guerrilla army that it did. The IRA was nothing without the support of the people.

It had within its ranks ordinary men and women who displayed extraordinary courage, bravery and determination at a dangerous and difficult time in our history. These were the men and women who fought when this community had no other option. They are also the men and women who have the necessary courage to pursue a peaceful path to a united Ireland now that one has emerged.

War is the option of last resort. You do not commit to a war for the sake of it. We are involved in a struggle for a united Ireland. It is about Irish freedom - not about positions, or egos, or personalities, or militarism.

Armed actions in the absence of a political strategy and popular support are pointless and do nothing to advance the cause of Irish freedom. Indeed the opposite is the reality. But that is the space, unfortunately, which a small number of people have chosen to occupy on a wholly negative agenda with wholly negative consequences.

I have heard some within these groups argue that their motivation is to drag the IRA back onto the battlefield. That will not happen. And indeed, myself, Gerry Adams and other Republican leaders have offered to meet with these various groups to set out in very clear terms where we see the struggle sitting and where it is headed in the years ahead. These offers have been repeatedly spurned. But no one should harbour the notion that the republican struggle can be advanced any further by a bogus, armed campaign. This leadership is firmly opposed to such a move. I appeal to the small number of young people who may have been influenced by these groups do not get involved in these pointless activities. If you want to contribute to the achievement of Irish freedom then get involved in the political process. It is through building political strength that we will convince those opposed to Irish unity that it is also in their best long-term interests. There is a place for everyone in this process and we need you to help us make it happen.

Earlier this week on the streets of this city a much loved member of our community was murdered. It was no accident. It was deliberate and it was calculated. It was also criminal - a young man from a family steeped in Irish republicanism was gunned down in our city. The rejection of those responsible for this murder was seen in the popular community opposition from the people of the Creggan, the Bogside, of this city at the vigil held on Tuesday night. The people's message was clear. What happened was totally wrong and unacceptable.

It remains to be seen who carried out this killing. It also remains to be seen

which organization will claim responsibility for the murder of Emmett Shiels. But many local people are utterly convinced that Emmet's killer came from one of those groups I have just referred to. I also believe that to be the case. To this point, 5 days on, there is no statement of responsibility. We will know soon enough who killed Emmet Shiels. But what I do know is this. Innocent victims, like Emmet Shiels, have been and will be the inevitable casualties of the acts of violence we have witnessed from these groups, particularly in recent months. Acts of violence, which can play no part of any serious attempt, no part of any effective strategy, to advance the cause of Irish freedom and national and democratic rights.

For the overwhelming majority of the citizens of Derry City this is unacceptable. It has to stop. And it has to stop now. These groups should listen to the voice of the people, as was witnessed here on Tuesday night, pack up and go away. We have now come to a point of no return. These people now have choices to make. These small groups have reached a fork in the road. For them the choice is clear, choose the peaceful and democratic road to a United Ireland - which is open to them - or they can choose to go down some sort of quasi-military cul-de-sac. There is no room for grey areas any longer.

Our people want a united Ireland. They want peace. They want safe communities and they want to be free from fear.

Last year during the debate on policing Republicans faced those opposed to our strategy in public meetings across the six counties including here in Derry. We did likewise in the Assembly election that followed. Republican communities spoke overwhelmingly in that poll. They did so again locally at Tuesday nights' vigil.

Sinn Féin overwhelmingly represents Republican communities. Some republicans may not agree with the path being offered by Sinn Féin - and that is their right. If they wish to offer an alternative political analysis that is fair enough and the people can decide - that is politics - that is democracy. But the message going out from here today and from the people of this city all week is very clear to these micro groups - accept the reality of a changed political landscape and listen to the people. Listen to the people of Derry, to the people of Ireland who are demanding that you halt your self serving and destructive activities now.

Meanwhile our task is to continue to drive forward. If republicans are to prevail, if the peace process is to be successfully concluded and Irish sovereignty and reunification secured, then we have to set the agenda - no one else is going to do that for us. So I would urge people to stay united - to stay focused on the prize and all of the time look ahead.

There is in place a strategy, which can deliver a united Ireland. It is up to all of us here to play our part and make sure that it happens." ENDS

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