

Ulster Unionist Party

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## **Sir Reg meets with the Parades Commission over planned homecoming parade**

Leader of the Ulster Unionist Party, Sir Reg Empey, has expressed his concern that PSNI personnel will be placed in an extremely difficult position if either the Sinn Fein or the unregulated republican protest against the planned homecoming parade, are allowed to enter into Donegal Square. Sir Reg met with the Parades Commission today to register his concerns. Sir Reg also voiced his regret that the Homecoming Parade, planned for 2<sup>nd</sup> November in Belfast, has been used by some to promote their own anti-political agenda.

Commenting today on his meeting with the Parades Commission Sir Reg said: "Allowing protesters to enter Donegal Square, will be a serious mistake - I believe in fact that the unregulated protest and Sinn Fein's protest will be mixed together leaving it impossible for police to sort out or distinguish one between the other".

"The only solution is to prevent the protesters from getting into Donegal Square in the first place".

"I have called on the Parades Commission to comment on the question of unregulated protests - It simply cannot be ignored".

"The parades Commission did not indicate precisely when it was going to make its determination, however we await the decision with anticipation"

Commenting on his disappointment that the Homecoming Parade may be used to promote narrow political expediency, Sir Reg said: "The Homecoming Parade for the armed forces is a parade to acknowledge the safe return of service personnel from a dangerous combat zone: as well as a quiet, simple tribute to those who died or were injured.

I understand that there are people who have both moral and political objections to the war and I recognise their democratic right to hold and express those objections. But I also believe that it is fundamentally wrong to allow those views to be targeted at the members of our armed services, who do not have the luxury to pick and choose where they serve."

"I am even more concerned by the fact that there are organisations which will try and use the Homecoming Parade as an opportunity to promote their own anti-British political agenda. And in Sinn Fein's case I suspect that they are responding to pressure from other elements within republicanism: in other words, they are demonstrating purely for the sake of trumpeting their own republican credentials"

I have already met Sir Hugh Orde to express my concerns to him about what will, undoubtedly, be a very difficult situation for his own personnel. I met with the Parades Commission this morning and pressed upon them the need to ensure that a non-political public event isn't deliberately and mischievously politicised by others with very specific agendas and I await with anticipation their decision."