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Campaign against Plastic Bullets Vigil/Picket

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Sinn Féin West Belfast MP Gerry Adams last night addressed the annual Plastic Bullet vigil held at the site of the old RUC barracks at Andersonstown. Mr. Adams took the opportunity to speak about Emma Groves who died earlier this year and who was a founding member of the campaign, as well as a victim.

The West Belfast MP said:

"For over two decades the United Campaign Against Plastic Bullets has fought a courageous battle against the British state's use of plastic bullets.

"Since rubber bullets were first introduced and then replaced by plastic bullets, seventeen people, 9 of them children and teenagers, have been killed by these lethal weapons.

"Thousands more were injured, many of them scarred and disabled for life.

"Rubber and plastic bullets were and are a weapon of terror; deliberately used by the British state and its agencies to intimidate and terrorise citizens.

"Since its formation after the killing of John Downes in August 1984 the United Campaign against Plastic Bullets has held a vigil/picket at this spot each year to remember the many victims and to demand the banning of this weapon.

"Foremost among those who stood here, year after year, in good weather and bad, was Emma Groves.

"With her friend Clara Reilly, Emma had founded the United Campaign Against Plastic Bullets. And along with Jim McCabe, whose wife Nora was killed by a plastic bullet in July 1981 and John Downes wife Brenda, and others they waged a relentless campaign here and internationally against this weapon and in pursuit of the truth of its use.

"In many ways Emma came to represent the indomitable spirit of the many relatives of the victims of plastic bullets.

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If you live outside of Ireland you can still play your part.

"A mother of 11 children she was standing in her living room when struck in the face by a rubber bullet fired by a British soldier in 1971. She was blinded as a result of her grievous injuries.

"But Emma never allowed her disability or her age to stand in the way of her speaking out against plastic bullets and travelling the world to lobby for their banning.

"Emma addressed the European Parliament. She travelled to Russia and to the USA demanding that the British be held accountable for their use of this weapon.

"She travelled to Scotland, along with other relatives, to picket the factory where plastic bullets are made.

"And she addressed the shareholders of the production company in America, which decided immediately to discontinue their role in the production of plastic bullets.

"She spoke wherever people would listen, telling her own story and demanding that plastic bullets be banned.

"I have no doubt that the progress we have made including Hugh Orde's acknowledgement of the hurt resulting from injuries and deaths of innocent people, including children, would not have been possible but for the efforts of Emma Groves and her friends.

"It is therefore all the more poignant that this is the first year that Emma is not here with us.

"Her loss, her absence is felt by all of us who knew her well and who stood here with her each year.

"But she remains someone from whom all of us can draw inspiration and encouragement in our lives.

"Emma was dedicated to her own family. And they to her. And we should say thank you to them for the support they gave her.

"But her love and compassion for all of us was equally remarkable.

"Emma was a great woman. I am proud and honoured to have known her.

"I believe it is right and fitting that in time a monument or something which would honour her memory, should be erected on this spot to remind us all of this strong, resolute and visionary west Belfast woman whose courage and bravery is an inspiration to us all.

"But I also believe the greatest monument we can erect to Emma Groves is to ensure that no plastic bullets are ever fired again and that the victims of this lethal weapon and of this conflict and their families have the right to truth.

"I would appeal to everyone here to join the march on Sunday and to wear a black ribbon that day in support of the hundreds of victims and their families demanding truth from the British government." ENDS

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