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Local & National

Priest appeals for calm amid fear of reprisals

Wednesday, March 14, 2007

By Deborah McAleese

Fears of reprisals following the brutal murders of two Belfast men sparked appeals for calm today after the killings were linked to feuding dissident republicans.

As police examined guns and ammunition found close to the spot where the badly beaten body of murder victim Joe Jones was found, his family released a statement saying they were "shocked", "traumatised" and "distressed" and wanted people to know he was a "good father, a good husband and a good brother".

The 38-year-old father-of-three from Poleglass was beaten to death and his body found in the Ardoyne area of north Belfast on Monday morning. Several hours earlier the body of Edward Burns (36), from north Belfast, was discovered near a secluded car park off the Falls Road. The father-of-five had been shot in the head.

Detectives investigating the double murder and attempted murder of a third man, who was shot in the upper body close to where Mr Burns was killed, have confirmed that the murders had come against a backdrop of tensions within dissident republicanism in Belfast.

There has been major unrest in north Belfast over the past few weeks with gunshots fired at a number of homes.

A group claiming to be made up of disaffected members of both the continuity IRA and INLA said last week it had made threats against people and threatened to step up its campaign of violence.

Parish Priest Fr Aidan Troy today said people in the area were feeling nervous that the murders could lead to further attacks.

"There has been a high level of tension in the area over the past few weeks with shots being fired at homes and now these murders. This type of thing terrorises a whole community. People are feeling very vulnerable at the minute as not all of us know who is doing this," he said.

Fr Troy added: "I would appeal for calm so there are no reprisals. If anyone should decide they need to hit back then the future is very bleak.

"If you can stand your ground and go through the proper challenges - whether that is going to the police or community representatives - that is the only way forward."

SDLP MLA Alex Attwood said there is a high level of anxiety in the area.

"People now need to step back. There is no doubt emotions are high but those responsible need to consider what the community wants. The last thing they want is for anything further to happen," he added.

Last night the area remained calm after North Belfast DCU Commander Chief Superintendent Gary White appealed for people with influence in the community to continue their work with police to ensure there are no further incidents.

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