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PADDY AGNEW in Rome

VATICAN REACTION: POPE BENEDICT yesterday issued a strong condemnation of the renewed violence in Northern Ireland that has seen two soldiers and one policeman killed in the last five days.

Speaking at the end of his weekly public audience in St. Peter's Square, the pope said: "It was with deep sorrow that I learned of the murders of two young British soldiers and a policeman in Northern Ireland.

"As I assure the families of the victims and the injured of my spiritual closeness, I condemn in the strongest terms these abominable acts of terrorism which, apart from desecrating human life, seriously endanger the ongoing peace process in Northern Ireland and risk destroying the great hopes generated by this process in the region and throughout the world."

Pope Benedict hoped that people would "continue building – through the patient effort of dialogue – a peaceful, just and reconciled society".

The pope has frequently expressed the hope that the Northern Ireland peace process might become an inspiration for political and religious leaders in other troubled regions.

This article appears in the print edition of the Irish Times

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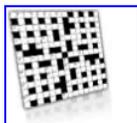
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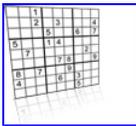
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