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PRESS RELEASE - EFFECTIVE IMMEDIATE

Garvaghy Road Residents' Coalition

c/o 3 Ashgrove Road
Portadown BT62 1EU,
Co. Armagh.
10th June 1997

Dear Sir,

We are writing to all Portadown Orangemen to explain our position about the return route of your annual walk from the service of worship at Drumcree Parish Church in July.

This is a sincere and genuine attempt to deal with many of the misconceptions concerning our campaign to have an agreed temporary partial re-routing of one of the many parades in Portadown each summer. Here are a number of points we would like to make for your information.

We accept that, in a ideal society, everyone should enjoy the right to the full freedom of expression of their political and civil beliefs. Those rights include freedom of assembly, freedom of movement, freedom of one's political, civil and religious beliefs.

We also recognise and accept the reality that, due to the political conflict which has taken place on this island for many years and for the past three decades in particular, we live in an abnormal society. Events in Portadown in recent times are also significant:

* The events of Drumcree 1995, the stand-off, the agreement and the subsequent triumphalism by the Unionist politicians and the Orange Order itself;

* The events of Drumcree 1996, the violence and lawlessness, the death of Michael McGoldrick and the behaviour of the RUC on the Garvaghy Road on July 11th.

* The recent murder of Robert Hamill by a gang on the main street of Portadown.

Therefore, while we are agreed to working towards a future situation whereby the rights of all can be respected and exercised freely and equally, we recognise that certain limitations and responsibilities need to be exercised in relation to particular rights and that due protection be given to the rights of political, religious and ethnic minorities.

We suggest that both sides publicly apologise for any hurt, offence or injustice caused by the conflict of interest in relation to marches.

The Nationalist community recognises and accepts the right of the Orange Order to parade to Drumcree and defends their right to hold a religious service at that location.

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The Orange Order are asked to recognise this willingness by Nationalists to secure the rights of Orangemen in relation to the parade to their church service at Drumcree. The Orange Order is asked to reciprocate this gesture by voluntarily re-routing their homeward parade away from Drumcree and Garvaghy Roads and by returning to Carlton Street Orange Hall by their outward route for an agreed period of time. Such a gesture by the Orange Order would be viewed as a demonstration of goodwill and sincere friendship towards the Nationalist community in Portadown.

Nationalists would recognise and accept such a gesture as not foreseeing a future where Orange parades, as a true expression of cultural diversity, would never be welcomed in Nationalist areas of Portadown.

Both sides will give an undertaking to embark upon a long-term process aimed at securing full equality of treatment in relation to the exercise of all rights for everyone, irrespective of the their individual or communal, political, civil and religious beliefs.

As we prepare to enter the new millenium, both sides agree to play a full role in creating a society based on justice and equality of treatment for all citizens in Portadown, in which every encouragement would be given to the establishment of mutual respect and understanding.

Following the agreed period of time, or earlier, the question of Orange parades along Drumcree and Garvaghy Roads can be reviewed, by representatives of the Nationalist community and Orangemen in Portadown, in the light of any progress made in relation to the previous two points.

We would emphasise that we are willing to meet with any Orangemen, any place and any time, to discuss any of the above points.

We sincerely hope that this letter will also go some way towards building up inter-community confidence and respect so that we can look forward not only to a peaceful Summer but to a more peaceful and tolerant era for all the people of our land.

Yours faithfully,

Éamon Stack (Secretary)

For further information -contact Breandán Mac Cionnaith/ Eamon Stack
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