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North's peace process 'only beneficiary' of 9/11 attack

By Staff Reporter

13/10/08



YOUNG GAELS: Children at Saturday's march for an Irish language act, which took place in Belfast city centre

PICTURE: Hugh Russell

NORTHERN Ireland's peace process was perhaps the only beneficiary of 9/11 following the worldwide revulsion against terror which it sparked, according to the Dean of St Anne's Cathedral.

Houston McKelvey told a congregation of former RUC officers their sacrifice was part of the global cost of peace.

He was speaking at the presentation by the RUC's George Cross Foundation of a stained-glass window, highlighting their service and loss, to the Anglican cathedral in Belfast yesterday.

Mr McKelvey said: "9/11 redefined terrorism in the USA, in the free world and gave a necessary boost to the peace process here.

"On 9/11 terrorism in Ireland lost its false righteousness. There was no longer any room for prevarication in Ireland or Irish America.

"We here in Ireland are perhaps the only beneficiaries of 9/11."

A total of 302 officers died and 8,500 were injured during 30 years of conflict.

The service was attended by secretary of state Shaun Woodward, PSNI chief constable Sir Hugh Orde and other dignitaries.

The dean praised former members of the police force for their quiet courage and dedication to peace and the

rule of law.

"Their values were not destroyed by bomb or bullet," he said.

"It was a high price – but the peace-makers and peace-maintainers won through."

Mr McKelvey said his conversations with victims of the violence had taught him a lot about forgiveness.

"And they taught me a lot about pain, deep, searing, soul-wrenching pain – visible in the eyes of wives, mothers, children, relatives, friends and colleagues," he recalled.

He remembered the dark days of blasts in Omagh, Enniskillen and La Mon: "Sights that none should have to witness".

There is a pillar of "courage" in the Cathedral – given by the mother of a young officer killed during the First World War, and two more carved in memory of other soldiers also killed in that war.

Mr McKelvey said: "These various memorials and your window are stark testimony that in every generation peace and basic freedoms have to be defended and maintained, and that the cost of that is very high indeed."

He said a loved one was irreplaceable.

"And that loss can only be enfolded. That pain will continue. I am a sceptic about the term closure."

Mr Woodward said it was a great honour to join the dedication of the window.

"We have a special opportunity today to remember all the brave men and women who gave their lives to protect the community.

"This unique window gives us all a chance to reflect on the extraordinary sacrifice of these officers."

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