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Sinn Fein Damaging Our Reputation Internationally



Ulster Unionist Party Leader Sir Reg Empey has strongly criticised Sinn Fein for undermining community relations ahead of next week's homecoming parade for the Royal Irish.

Sir Reg said, "The undignified and unedifying spectacle of Sinn Fein protesting against an Irish Regiment made up of Catholics and Protestants from both sides of the border speaks volumes about Sinn Fein's bigotry. The men and women of the Royal Irish have served with courage and dignity in Afghanistan in order to bring peace and security to a troubled country. They deserve our respect and gratitude. Those who disagree with the parade should exercise the tolerance that is required if Belfast and Northern Ireland is to have a truly shared future.

"It is also worth noting that in recent comments about the homecoming parade, Sinn Fein has quite explicitly sided with the Taliban in Afghanistan and the forces of terror in Iraq. While this immature politics of the hard-left may play to a certain constituency inside Sinn Fein, it profoundly damages Northern Ireland's international image and standing. Irrespective of legitimate differences over the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, no mainstream, democratic political party anywhere in the Western world glorifies the terrorism of the Taliban or Al Qaeda - but this is precisely what Sinn Fein has done. It would do something to restore the damage to Northern Ireland's international standing if Sinn Fein either cancelled their planned protest or took the decision to radically scale it down.

"I share the revulsion of ordinary people across the community in Northern Ireland at Sinn Fein's reckless and sectarian approach to the Royal Irish homecoming parade. I do, however, appeal for calm from the public and resolve from the MoD. I would urge the public not to respond to the provocations of Sinn Fein - and I call on the MoD to remain firm in the face of Sinn Fein intimidation. The Royal Irish embraces men and women from both of the historic political and cultural traditions on the island of Ireland, who have performed an important service to the international community. Belfast and Northern Ireland rightly wishes to honour them. It would be a profound set-back for a shared future if this is prevented."

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Ulster Unionist Party
First Floor, 174 Albertbridge Road,
Belfast BT5 4GS
Tel: 028 9046 3200
Fax: 028 9045 6899

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