

Alliance

The
Alliance
Party of
Northern
Ireland

Northern Ireland's
cross-community
party



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Ford speech in Assembly on Antrim attack

2.00.00pm GMT Mon 9th Mar 2009

Here is the text of
Alliance Leader David
Ford's speech in the
Assembly today
condemning the attack in
Antrim which saw two
soldiers killed on Saturday
night.

David Ford, who is an
Assembly Member for the
area, said: "On behalf of
my party in the Assembly
and in the wider
community, I have words
this morning of sympathy,
condemnation and
solidarity. Our first words
must be of sympathy for
the families of Mark
Quinsey and Cengiz
'Patrick' Azimkar, the two
young sappers who were killed on Saturday night. Those two young men were
doing their duty and serving this community before they proceeded to do their
duty in Afghanistan in uniform. Our sympathy goes out to their families, friends
and comrades, some of whom were still in Antrim while others were already in
Afghanistan, and in particular, to their two wounded comrades, who are being
treated in hospital here.

"We all knew the dangers that they would face when they got to Afghanistan; few
of us could have thought that there was such a danger in ordering a pizza on a
Saturday night in the United Kingdom. Added to that, we must have sympathy for



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the two local men who were earning an honest living by delivering those pizzas. One of them was from an Antrim family; the other had established a home here because he wanted to better himself and his family. Our thoughts and prayers are with them, and with those in the emergency services who looked after them on Saturday night, and the staff of Antrim Area Hospital, who continue to care for them and continue to seek to preserve life today.

"It is right that all of us in this place condemn this atrocity, regardless of our background or our perception of the way things are. I cannot understand how any evil minds could have thought that the murders that were carried out on Saturday night could serve any cause or could produce anything but sorrow and suffering for the families concerned.

"The two soldiers who died were both at primary school when we started on the process that led to agreement on Good Friday in 1998 and to the establishment of this Assembly. Last year, 38 Engineer Regiment was honoured with the freedom of the borough of Antrim because of the work that its members had done in helping the local community. That is a measure of who they were, where they came from and what they had done for society. It was a sign of how much this community has moved on in the past decade. We must make it absolutely clear from this Chamber today that we will not allow ourselves to be dragged back; that whatever the difficulties, we will continue to ensure that the process works.

"I do not believe that there was ever such a thing as a legitimate target. However, the horror of the assault on Saturday night, and the way in which it was perpetrated, not just on those who wore uniforms, but on the civilians who were serving the local community in Antrim, adds a perverted twist to any of that kind of logic. It is important that we stand here in solidarity together in order to show that politics works, and let people know that whatever death and suffering may be inflicted on society, there will be no going back on the concept of a process that is bringing people together.

"It is no secret that I am not the greatest fan of the way in which the Executive have worked. However, let us be absolutely clear that we are showing the way forward, whatever faltering steps we take or whatever criticisms I may have about the detail. This Assembly is giving the way forward for the people of Northern Ireland, and it must continue to do so; even more so in the face of what we had to put up with.

I have a different take on things from the other four party leaders who have spoken because I have lived in Antrim all my adult life. I have had the honour of representing Antrim people since 1993. I now face the prospect, because of the way that we so often refer to events by place names, that when people talk about Antrim in future, they will think of Saturday night. However, that was not Antrim; Antrim was Sunday lunchtime. Antrim was the people of the town standing in simple and quiet dignity as an expression of sympathy to the soldiers who had lost their lives and to their comrades, and as an expression of solidarity as they stood together. That was the message that we should take from the weekend.

"When Father Tony Devlin, who has provided huge leadership to our community, led his parishioners across the road and stood at the tape, he gave a clear statement:

"You do not act in our name."

"When people from the Church of Ireland, and the Methodist and Presbyterian

Churches joined them, they said that, whatever is thrown at us, we stand together. That message, which was an answer message yesterday, must be an Assembly message today.

"I thank the First Minister and the deputy First Minister for the comments that they made and the leadership that they gave yesterday. I do not share either of their backgrounds, and I would not have used the same words exactly that either of them used, but I believe that they spoke - although separately - together for all of us. We have to move that process forward. We have to ensure that we make politics in this place work. We must show the tiny minority that politics can work. Indeed, we have to show the world - in the face of this atrocity - that politics does work.

"This morning, my colleagues and I recalled the dreadful deaths of Damien Trainor and Philip Allen in Poyntzpass, in March 1998. That was a terrible tragedy for those men's families, and yet, somehow, it provided the catalyst to ensure that people came together and built something better. I hope and pray that the lesson of Saturday night at Massereene Barracks gates is one that we can all take forward, and I pledge my colleagues and myself to that end."

ENDS

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