

Sinn Féin Distances Itself From Hearne's Comments on Israel

Sinn Féin has distanced itself from recent comments by Waterford Councillor John Hearne that the UN should shell Israel over ongoing attacks on Gaza, to force the Israeli Government to engage in talks.

Cllr Hearne's views, first aired on WLR FM's 'Deise AM' on July 18th were again raised by another Waterford politician, Fine Gael's Maurice Cummins, in the Seanad last week during a debate on Gaza.

Cllr Hearne had expressed the opinion to Deise AM host Billy McCarthy that the United Nations shelling Israel would bring Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu 'to heel', adding that "you can't let him butcher women and kids."

When challenged by McCarthy, Cllr Hearne said such an action would "get them to the table" and controversially cited the Canary Wharf bombing carried out by the IRA in London's financial district in 1996 in which two people died and an estimated £100 million worth of damage was caused.

"The English were never coming to the table until Canary Wharf happened", said Cllr Hearne, who is due to become Mayor of Waterford's Metropolitan District in 2017 in a Mayoral pact supported by Senator Cummins' party, Fine Gael.

In the Seanad last week, former City Mayor Senator Cummins said he hoped comments made during the Upper House debate would be 'more constructive' than 'those of the leader of Sinn Féin on Waterford City and County Council', Cllr Hearne.

"Is this the type of foreign policy and diplomacy we can expect from Sinn Féin if it is ever in government?", Senator Cummins told the house.

"When the mask slips, this is an example of what lies beneath the surface. The people need to be made aware of it. This type of advice from Sinn Féin will certainly not help the suffering people of Palestine or advance the cause of peace in any way."

The Sinn Féin press office later released a statement saying Cllr Hearne's comments were not reflective of the party's position on the situation in Gaza.

"The stated mission of the UN is to foster peace and security", the spokesperson said. "Our statements over the past few weeks, particularly those from the party leadership, provide a clear articulation of the Sinn Féin position. We believe that an inclusive peace process based on dialogue and respect for human rights is the mechanism through which a lasting peace can be delivered in the Middle East.

"While Cllr Hearne's words are regrettable he is understandably emotional about the indiscriminate killing of Palestinian civilians by the Israeli military.

"John has visited Palestine on a number of occasions and he has witnessed this oppression first hand. This is not a justification but it does provide a context for the comments. However, Sinn Féin in no way condones these remarks."