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Tuesday, March 17, 2009

## Clinton condemns 'criminals' who killed British troops and PSNI officer



Minister for Foreign Affairs Micheal Martin answers questions from journalists with US secretary of state Hillary Clinton after their meeting at the state department in Washington yesterday.  
Photograph: Leslie E Kossoff/LK Photos

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DENIS STAUNTON in Washington

US SECRETARY of state Hillary Clinton has condemned as “criminals” the killers of two British soldiers and a police officer in the North, declaring that the United States would not allow the gains of the peace process to be destroyed.

Speaking after a 45-minute meeting with Minister for Foreign Affairs Micheál Martin, Mrs Clinton praised the response to the killings by political leaders in the North, throughout Ireland and in Britain .

“In recent days, a handful of rejectionists have tried to drag the people of Northern Ireland back into a full cycle of violence and retaliation. The recent attacks, which killed British soldiers and a police officer, are an affront to the values of every community, every ethnicity, every religion and every nation that seeks peace,” she said.

“The success of the peace process has consequences that go far beyond Northern Ireland. It provides proof to people everywhere that negotiations, dialogue, reconciliation,

diplomacy can end conflicts that have tormented generations. The United States stand with the people of Northern Ireland. We will not let criminals destroy the gains that have been achieved through great courage and sacrifice.”

Mrs Clinton sharply corrected a reporter who referred to the killers as “dissidents”, adding that she was personally distressed when she heard of the violence.

“Not dissidents. I’m all in favour of dissidents. I’m not in favour of criminals,” she said.

“When these criminal elements, these rejectionists determined to kill and try to set the communities against one another in Northern Ireland again, to relive the Troubles and the bad days that everyone worked so hard to resolve, it was distressing.

“But I was immediately heartened by the response across Northern Ireland and the island of Ireland, with people speaking out against the murderers and the violence and the provocation these actions represented.”

During yesterday’s meeting, Mrs Clinton and Mr Martin discussed a range of issues, including development aid, immigration and the Middle East peace process. The Minister discussed his recent visits to the Middle East and to Cuba and told Mrs Clinton that Ireland was willing to help the US to resettle detainees currently held at Guantanamo Bay .

“We wanted to see the closure of Guantanamo. We believed it was overall injurious to the public perception of the West, the public perception of the US and also in terms of the human rights dimension to it. We have said that we are willing to respond with an offer of assistance,” Mr Martin said later, adding that the US was working with the European Commission on the issue.

Mrs Clinton noted that European governments had pressed the US to close Guantanamo, a step President Barack Obama has now taken. She said the administration was now reviewing each detainee’s case to establish what course of action should be taken on an individual basis. “It is clear that we will need help because many of the detainees cannot safely – for themselves or others – be sent back to the countries from which they came,” she said.

This article appears in the print edition of the Irish Times

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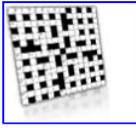
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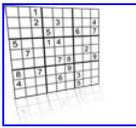
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