

# Northern Ireland continues to see sectarian attacks: Church leaders call for end to violence

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Sectarian attacks in Northern Ireland were showing no sign of abating by the end of August, despite a recent declaration by the Irish Republican Army that it will lay down its arms, according to both Catholic and Protestant communities reporting attacks.

The leader of the (Anglican) Church of Ireland, Archbishop Robin Eames, said in a statement August 29 that there was “no justification or excuse” for the daily attacks.

“Innocent people and families are facing danger to their lives simply because of their religion or political identity,” he said. “Protestants and Roman Catholics must reject and condemn all attacks made under the guise of Loyalism [from the Protestant side] or republicanism [from the Catholic community],” he said.

One recent target was the Motte 'n' Bailey bar in Dunmurray, on the outskirts of Belfast in an area inhabited by Catholics. White paint was thrown across it in the early hours of August 24. The same night a car was set on fire outside a house in the Somerdale Park area of the city while a petrol bomb, which failed to go off, was thrown at a house in Skegoneill Avenue. These attacks are believed to have been carried out by Protestant youths.

On August 22, as petrol bombs and stones were thrown at shops in the Ardoyne area of north Belfast, police officers were mobilized in an attempt to keep rival gangs of Protestants and Catholics apart. The same evening, also in north Belfast, a Protestant couple in their 80s were left traumatized by an attack on their home.

Nelson McCausland, a local politician and member of the Democratic Unionist Party, the largest party in Northern Ireland, led by Protestant minister-leader Ian Paisley, described the attack as “blatantly sectarian and clearly well organized.”

The preceding week a Catholic couple, a Catholic school and a Catholic church were targeted in Ahoghill, in County Antrim.

In a joint statement issued following those incidents, the ministers of the area's three Presbyterian churches found it necessary "to condemn without reservation the ongoing cycle of attacks in the village of Ahoghill, and to call for those involved in such evil activity to cease forthwith."

Ministers Eddie Kirk, David McGaughy and Harry Uprichard (who is also moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland) said the attackers' "creed is not that of historic Protestantism." -*Ecumenical News International*