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PRICE 60p (IR 90 EURO) Wednesday, July 11, 2007

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Sinn Fein looking to the PSNI for justice

UNIONISTS have welcomed Sinn Fein's decision to meet with police over assaults in the republican heartland of South Armagh.

In what observers are interpreting as a highly significant development, local MP Conor Murphy called for the meeting after attacks on several people near Crossmaglen. "It is essential that communities get the policing service that they are entitled to," Mr Murphy said.

"I believe that a critical engagement between republican communities and the PSNI can help bring this about."

Ulster Unionist MLA Danny Kennedy said the move indicated that local communities recognised that the PSNI are and should be used as the civil power.

"It's a new departure for a republican in South Armagh to be requesting meetings

BY KATE CHAMBRÉ

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with the PSNI," he said.

In recent years the police have resumed foot patrols in the mainly rural area of South Armagh, which was once so dangerous they had to be flown in helicopters and accompanied by soldiers.

Chief Constable Sir Hugh Orde has visited the area, which has been plagued with anti-social behaviour and criminality such as fuel smuggling.

Mr Kennedy said: "It's a welcome move because clearly the only lawful authority in terms of dealing with assaults would be the PSNI."

He said that some people were "relatively

new to this concept". Republicans, he added, traditionally made their own justice.

"It was a pretty ruthless regime where there were either punishment beatings or people were expelled from their local community," Mr Kennedy said.

Mr Murphy said local people had concerns about the policing response in tackling anti-social violence and criminality in the area.

"Sinn Fein want to see the local community and criminal justice agencies, especially the PSNI, working together to ensure that people can live in peace and safety, free from intimidation, threat or violence."

A police spokeswoman said: "The PSNI meet regularly with political representatives and are in the process of arranging a meeting with Mr Murphy."



SEEKING MEETING: Sinn Fein MP Conor Murphy

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