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A man works to remove a broken window from a sport shop in Dublin Nov. 24, 2023, which w

A man works to remove a broken window from a sport shop in Dublin Nov. 24, 2023, which was damaged in a night of rioting that followed a school stabbing attack Nov. 23. (OSV News photo/Clodagh Kilcoyne, Reuters)



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Dublin — January 3, 2024

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Archbishop Dermot Farrell of Dublin has expressed concern over the "significant numbers" of people in Ireland "seeking to foment disinformation, suspicion and hatred" towards refugees and migrants.

Speaking to OSV News, the archbishop warned of the "significant threat" posed by "those with an agenda to generate unrest" targeting "those who can be easily identified as 'other' or 'different.'"

Archbishop Dermot Farrell of Dublin delivers his homily at the World Day of Peace Mass in Ba

Archbishop Dermot Farrell of Dublin delivers his homily at the World Day of Peace Mass in Ballyroan Parish, Dublin, on Jan. 1, 2024. (OSV News photo/courtesy John McElroy)

His comments were made in the aftermath of the Nov. 23 riots in Dublin city center, which were stoked up by anti-refugee protests following a stabbing incident in the Irish capital. The attack occurred near Parnell Square, just off the city's main boulevard, O'Connell Street, and within the parish boundaries of St. Mary's Pro-Cathedral. Three children and their crèche teacher from Cólaiste Mhuire, which means St. Mary's College, were injured.

A 5-year-old boy who suffered minor physical injuries was discharged from the hospital within hours of the attack, while a 6-year-old girl sustained head injuries and had to undergo surgery but was later also released from the hospital, according to the BBC.

A 5-year-old girl and the school care worker, who is in her 30s, were described as critically ill in the days after the stabbing. Prior to Christmas, they were still both receiving hospital treatment.

After the stabbing incident, in a Nov. 23 statement, Farrell said he heard the news of a "horrific attack" on schoolchildren with "utter disbelief" and invited "the people of Dublin to join me in praying" for those affected, "especially for the recovery of those who have been injured."

Before Christmas, the alleged attacker, a 50-year-old man of Algerian origin, Riad Bouchaker, was charged with the attempted murder of three children and with assault causing serious harm to the care worker.

Right after the Nov. 23 attack, as rumors spread that the alleged attacker was an Irish citizen of North African origin, riots broke out, resulting in the largest deployment of public order police in the history of the Irish state, according to the BBC. Stores were looted, public transportation cars burned and police officers were injured.

"Sadly, we also witnessed the magnetic power of destruction to draw young and not-so-young into a maelstrom of adrenaline-fueled mayhem," the archbishop said of the rioters.

However, the leader of the largest diocese in the Irish church said he took comfort from the almost universal revulsion at what had happened as well as the "goodwill and common sense of so many people in our parishes, schools, sports clubs and in everyday life who have offered a hand of friendship and words of welcome to those who have made their homes here, often as a result of war and persecution in their place of origin."

Separately, the Primate of All Ireland, Archbishop Eamon Martin of Armagh, expressed concern to OSV News about those who seek to present "often very vulnerable people coming to Ireland as our enemies."

"To speak about a 'them' and 'us' and that kind of fairly selective use of situations to foster fear or a sense of threat in local communities is totally against the teaching of our church," he said.

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Asked if a Catholic could ever justify being racist, Archbishop Martin responded: "No is the answer to that question."

"I don't think there is any place for bigotry, racism, or for the kind of irrational prejudice that we are seeing voiced by a small number of people, who take the genuine concerns of a local community and use that to stir up hate and antagonism," he said.

"Clearly, we are not talking about people who have in any way reflected on the message of Christ. Think of the many examples in the Gospels where Jesus reached out beyond the political and the racial or societal boundaries," Martin added.

Meanwhile, at a Mass for World Day of Peace Jan. 1, in the Dublin Parish of Ballyroan, Farrell told the congregation -- which included members of the diplomatic corps and retired Archbishop of Dublin, Diarmuid Martin, as well as Archbishop Luis Mariano Montemayor, apostolic nuncio to Ireland -- that fear can prove "corrosive" in society.

The archbishop also commented on the torching of a vacant property in Ringsend, a suburb in Dublin, on New Year's Eve, which far-right campaigners had claimed was earmarked for dozens of asylum seekers, and which had seen a number of protests in recent weeks. "It is not enough to condemn incidents like (the) fire in Ringsend;

we have a responsibility to understand and urgently address the roots of this unwarranted fear, and the harm it unleashes," Farrell said.

"Conflicts survive on the caricature of our opponents. We make our sisters and brothers -- often people we have never encountered -- different to ourselves. It is this tendency -- and it is in us all -- that we must work to address," he said.

At Christmas Mass in St. Mary's Pro-Cathedral in Dublin, the church leaders warned of the "rhetoric of hate."

In an apparent challenge to anti-refugee groups who campaign under the slogan "Ireland is full," Farrell said that "there is room in our inn, room for those driven from their homes by wars and economic deprivation. We may not forget our history!"