STATEMENT

I was deeply shocked to hear of the sheer scale of the casualties at 'The Pulse' gay night club in Orlando.

It is hard to comprehend the enormity of the act and the awful nature of the suffering of the members of the LGBT community.   
Those who survived will never be the same again, while the lives of so many, mostly young victims out enjoying themselves on a Saturday night have been cruelly and abruptly ended.  
Such attacks on gay venues, with high casualty rates, have occurred before - in London, the US and Israel, while there have been single murders in Belfast like that of Darren Bradshaw at the Parliament Bar (and the Rev David Templeton), and more recently three gay men who were killed in London by a bomb at the Admiral Duncan pub.  
Northern Ireland is no stranger to mass murder.  
Our community knows there is a reservoir of hatred out there that can be motivated to action by political organisations and by religious hate speech. In this case it was Islamist.  
The people of Belfast will I know express their solidarity with the people of Orlando, a city in Florida many of us know well and have visited.   
Your pain having to bury so many fine people will be hard to bear.  
I have asked that our City Hall officials put arrangements in place to allow citizens to show their sympathy to our American friends and that the City Hall gates be opened for people to gather in the grounds on Tuesday at the planned demonstration of support.

[The Chief Executive of the council has now ordered that the gates be opened.]

Jeff Dudgeon (Belfast City Councillor and NIGRA Treasurer)

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