

Kezia Dugdale statement on Manchester terror attack

Below is the statement from Scottish Labour leader Kezia Dugdale to the Scottish Parliament following the Manchester terror attack:

“They would have been dressed in pink, in sparkles, bunny ears perched on their heads and grins on their faces. The very picture of innocence.

“The children who went to see American pop star and Disney TV actress, Ariana Grande, at the Manchester Arena last night would have been unable to contain their excitement. The atmosphere would have been electric.

“Every one of us has been there – been one of them. Enthralled by the sound and vision of a pop star at their peak. Desperate to see, in the flesh, the person whose image we’ve plastered on our bedroom walls.

“Being at a gig is a moment of sheer joy.

“Last night that joy was destroyed in a despicable act of cowardice.

“All that excitement, that innocent elation, turned to fear, to shock, and to horror.

“Just hours after they arrived, children left the concert crying, screaming, utterly bewildered by what had just happened; their ears ringing, not with the echo of pop music, but with the blast of a bomb.

“Today, those children will know that 22 of those who had shared the joy of the concert alongside them, are dead.

“That 59 people are in hospital with terrible injuries. And that too many parents are still desperately searching for the children who haven’t come home.

“Those children too will know the phrase ‘suicide bomber’ and the appalling reality of what that means.

“A story which they might have watched on Newsround, couched in age-appropriate language to soften the roughest of edges, has brutally intruded into their young lives.

“For us, as adults, hearing the news of terrorist atrocities – be they bombs, or bullets, or cars mowing people down in the street – is all too sadly now commonplace.

“We tend to cover our children’s ears and eyes to protect them from the knowledge.

“And we hold them closer, all too aware of the fragility of their precious

lives.

“But for those children and young people who witnessed last night’s abominable act, there is no softening the blow, no making it better, no suggesting that these things don’t happen here, or to us, or to people we know.

“They are now fully aware that when someone determines to kill others, when someone purposefully straps a bomb to their body with a twisted plan to detonate it among innocent children, that there is nothing any one of us can do to prevent the horrific, inevitable, outcome.

“And we cannot explain it to them. How can you tell an eight-year-old that there is a justifiable reason that children died last night? How can you explain the actions, the thought-process, of someone who can look at a concert full of young people and see nothing but a target?

“But what we can do is respond well. We can teach our children that the only way to counter such barbarity is not with hate and with fear, but with compassion, tolerance, kindness and love.

“Like the people of Manchester did last night; flocking to help, taking people home, offering places to stay, and searching for children who had become separated from their parents.

“Like those who work in our emergency services did – as they always do – running, unflinching, towards horror, rather than away from it, to offer comfort and care and rescue.

“No doubt over the coming days we will discover the name of the coward who chose to kill excited children at a concert, and there will be attempts to understand why they did it.

“For those who are grieving there will be no worthy answers. For those left traumatised, there will be no comprehension.

“What there will be though is a toughening of our resolve in the face of terror.

“A renewal of our belief in the enduring British values of tolerance and respect.

“And a determination to make sure that such horrific acts will never undermine our freedom, nor our democracy.”