



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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**Northern
Ireland**

Today there is a new spirit abroad in favour of peaceful co-existence among nations. An international atmosphere now prevails in which fundamental differences between States are being resolved and long-standing disputes peacefully settled and conflicts brought to an end. In an increasingly united Europe the old divisions are becoming more and more meaningless and out of place.

We Irish, North and South have done much to bring civilisation and humane values to many parts of the world. We are respected internationally for our support for the peace-keeping activities of the UN. The Irish army shared in the honour of the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to the UN peace-keeping forces. Yet peace continues to elude us at home. The agony of all the people of Northern Ireland has gone on for a long time and the killing and suffering continues. Can any of us North and South committed to constitutional politics be satisfied that we are doing enough? Are we to confine ourselves to coming up with new words of condemnation with which to condemn the latest atrocity? We must find a way forward.

The key to overcoming the problems of history often lies in the development of new relationships. In 1980 a framework for closer Anglo-Irish relations was established, and I am glad that following on from that a Joint Irish-British Parliamentary body will now be set up. The Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985 concentrated on the problems of Northern Ireland, and has contributed to a degree of progress and reform over the last eighteen months which needs to be further consolidated. Examples of this are the new fair employment legislation, special assistance to underdeveloped areas with high unemployment, and reforms in prison policy. But changes are also required to improve confidence in the security and judicial systems, and to put an end to harassment.

Since we came to office, this Government have implemented honourably and in good faith a solemn and binding international agreement with its attendant advantages and disadvantages. This International Agreement cannot be treated as if it were simply a bargaining counter. No-one ever claimed that the Agreement represented a lasting solution. But until such time as something better or more acceptable can be negotiated and agreed to take its place, the present Agreement must stand.

A very natural development of the present situation, however, would be, in parallel with the working relationship between the British and Irish Governments, to develop the ultimately more important relationship between the two major traditions on this island. The people of the Northern Protestant tradition belong in this country, as the poet John Hewitt affirmed:

This is our country also, nowhere else;
and we should not be outcast on the world

That is accepted without question by the Government and people of this State.

Political progress may not of itself bring violence to an end, but it would at the very least undermine its base and make it even more

meaningless and irrelevant. If there were on all sides clear signs of a desire for change, indications that old attitudes could be adapted to new circumstances, a widespread demand for a new beginning achieved through the political process, this must have an impact in making violence and terror not just abhorrent but absurd as well.

I have made clear my earnest wish to enter into dialogue with the Unionist leadership so that I may hear from them at first hand what are their priorities and their hopes for the future. That would be the clearest possible signal to all that there was some possibility, however tenuous, of progress forward out of the present horror. If such a development could bring us even one step forward, one step away from violence, as I sincerely believe it would, then it is difficult to see how the Unionist leadership can be morally justified in refusing the invitation which I now again extend to them. I believe that political circumstances are opportune at present for such a meeting, and that it would be welcomed by a great majority of men and women of goodwill all over Ireland. The dialogue that I have in mind need not involve any commitments. Nothing need be prejudged, nothing ruled out.

In this part of Ireland at present we are actively engaged in making our preparations for the arrival of the single market throughout the European Community by 1992. The completion of the internal market will have far-reaching implications for Ireland as a whole.

Both parts of Ireland, North and South, have a vital common interest in these new developments.

In a few years' time the island of Ireland will be the only substantial region left without direct land links to the rest of the Community. In 1992 the economic border will disappear, and Ireland itself will be a single market within the wider European one. No political differences can obscure this economic reality. The economic needs of both parts of Ireland are steadily converging. Both parts of Ireland today need industrial investment from abroad, tourism, external markets for agricultural produce and infrastructural spending. I would very much welcome an early dialogue with political leaders in Northern Ireland about these momentous and far-reaching prospects, because I know that if we could agree on a common approach the economic future of the whole island can be transformed.

The momentum of history and its ability to bring about change and reconciliation between opposing forces should never be underestimated. The Fianna Fáil Party was founded on the basis that committed Republicans had to find political means to uphold the rights of the Irish people, and has experienced considerable success in that endeavour. The recourse to violence to achieve political objectives has no place in the affairs of the family of Western parliamentary democracies.

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and harmony and in that unity to achieve the highest possible level of prosperity for all the people on this island. If violence were to cease, the possibility would open up, as it did in the New Ireland Forum, for a broad consensus among nationalists on how to achieve political stability based on justice. Our efforts, supported by a large majority of Irish people everywhere, could then be constructively directed to persuading our Unionist countrymen that their future lay with us in a partnership of equals and in convincing the British Government that the future of Ireland could and should be left to all the Irish people to decide for themselves.

We must always keep these broad objectives in focus. It is for that reason all the more important that we keep to the high ground, and remain steadfast in our adherence to the impartial enforcement of the law and to upholding accepted international standards in the administration of justice and guaranteeing human rights.

It is in the highest interests of the Irish people, North and South, that our laws be impartially upheld and enforced. We value our place in the Community of law-abiding peace-loving nations too highly to neglect in any way to play our part in defeating international terrorism and crime and to take all reasonable steps to prevent violence and bloodshed.

We are at the same time determined to ensure that the rights of Irish citizens, wanted for any offence outside this jurisdiction, will be fully safeguarded under our legislation. The rule of law must always be fully and clearly upheld, as the basis of international cooperation and extradition must be based on mutual confidence in the administration of justice. It is essential that the rights of the individual are not prejudiced in advance but left to be decided in the calm atmosphere of the judicial process.

I see it very clearly as the task of this Government and the present generation of Fianna Fáil, by patient discussion and honourable behaviour at all times, to persuade all the people of Ireland that the present state of affairs need not continue and that together we can create a far better future in harmony and understanding.