



An Chartlann Náisiúnta **National Archives**

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STATEMENT BY TAOISEACH IN RESPONSE TO WEEKEND
COMMENTS BY UNIONIST POLITICIANS

As I indicated yesterday, I welcome the recent comments by Mr. Nicholson and Mr. Allen, and I share their view of the pressing necessity to create hope for the future, and to create new stable relationships in Northern Ireland and Ireland as a whole based on mutual trust and respect and regard for each other's rights and traditions.

The last couple of weeks have seen a broadening of the debate about the scope for political progress and for positive developments in relationships within and between these islands. I welcome all constructive contributions to this debate and I am encouraged by the thoughtful and forward-looking remarks made by Mr. Nicholson and Mr. Allen.

The start of a new decade reinforces our sense of urgency about bringing to an end the violence that the people of Northern Ireland have endured for the past twenty years. Additionally, Ireland's Presidency of the European Community underlines our common European vocation - the need to set aside ancient quarrels and focus on contemporary realities. There is also a perception that the political climate may now be more conducive to progress than at any time in the immediate past.

All the people of Ireland are destined to form part of a united Europe in the future, in which historic differences and divisions must be put aside. The future prosperity and well-being of the people of Northern Ireland, and indeed of Ireland as a whole, in the new Europe can be greatly enhanced if we succeed in adopting a whole new approach to the relations between us.

The Anglo-Irish Agreement has been honoured by the Irish and British Governments, as a binding international agreement between two sovereign Governments. We have respected that binding quality and, since assuming office, my Government have implemented the Agreement effectively. I would like to reiterate the Government's commitment to continuing to work the Agreement fully unless and until it is transcended by a new and more comprehensive arrangement.

The Agreement has been implemented in particular with a view to

improving the conditions of the people living in Northern Ireland. But it has never been regarded on any side as either immutable or guaranteed to solve the problems of Northern Ireland. Rather is it a process which tackles those problems, and will continue to do so until it is superseded by something better. If in this regard a new and more broadly-based Agreement can be reached by direct discussions and negotiations between all the parties involved, the Irish Government would be prepared to contemplate in agreement with the British Government a new and better structure, agreement or arrangement to transcend the existing one.

For such a development to bear fruit, all parties concerned would have to be involved fully and directly in the negotiations. For that reason, ~~I wish to reiterate today that I would welcome hearing Unionist concerns at first hand. I would place no restriction on the agenda for such a meeting and it could of course take place without prejudice to the Unionist position on the Agreement.~~ Any such meeting would, in my view, focus very substantially on the development of the three sets of relationships in and between these islands, that between the communities in the North, between North and South, and between Britain and Ireland. A more lasting solution will in my view depend on the further dynamic development of these three sets of relationships.

I have a completely open mind about the structure, venue or

channels to be used for any discussions that might be envisaged.

22nd January, 1990.