



## An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

<b>Reference Code:</b>	2021/93/46
<b>Creator(s):</b>	Department of the Taoiseach
<b>Accession Conditions:</b>	Open
<b>Copyright:</b>	National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.

House of Commons 26 March 1991

## **POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT IN NORTHERN IRELAND**

### **BROOKE STATEMENT TO THE HOUSE OF COMMONS**

1. Mr Speaker, I am pleased to be able to inform the House that, following extensive discussions with the main constitutional political parties in Northern Ireland - the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland, the Social Democratic and Labour Party, the Ulster Democratic Unionist Party and the Ulster Unionist Party - and with the Irish Government, a basis for formal political talks now exists. I frankly acknowledge to the House that this would not have been possible without the goodwill and determination of the Northern Ireland parties and the helpful and constructive approach taken by the Irish Government. The stated positions of all these parties are well known. Her Majesty's Government reaffirms its position that Northern Ireland's present status as a part of the United Kingdom will not change without the consent of a majority of its people.
2. The endeavour on which we have all agreed to embark is an ambitious one. We are setting out to achieve a new beginning for relationships within Northern Ireland, within the island of Ireland and between the peoples of these islands. While a successful outcome cannot be guaranteed in advance, I am confident that all the potential participants are committed to a forward-looking and constructive approach. For their part, the two signatories of the Anglo-Irish Agreement - the British and Irish Governments - have made clear that they would be prepared to consider a new and more broadly based agreement or structure if such an arrangement can be arrived at through direct discussion and negotiation between all of the parties concerned.
3. To allow an opportunity for such a wider political dialogue the two Governments have agreed not to hold a meeting of the Anglo-Irish Conference between two pre-specified dates. All of the parties concerned will make use of this interval for intensive discussions to seek the new and more broadly based agreement which I have just described.
4. As the Conference will not be meeting between the specified dates the Secretariat at Maryfield will accordingly not be required for that period to discharge its normal role of servicing Conference meetings provided for in Article 3 of the Agreement.

5. It is accepted that discussions must focus on three main relationships: those within Northern Ireland, including the relationship between any new institutions there and the Westminster Parliament; among the people of the island of Ireland; and between the two Governments. It is common ground between all the parties that hope of achieving a new and more broadly based agreement rests on finding a way to give adequate expression to the totality of the relationships I have mentioned.

6. Talks will accordingly take place in three strands corresponding respectively to the three relationships. Some arrangement will be needed for liaison between the different strands of these complex discussions. All the Northern Ireland parties will participate actively and directly in the North/South discussions. The Unionist parties have made clear that they wish their participation in those talks to be formally associated with my presence and that they will regard themselves as members of the United Kingdom team.

7. It is accepted by all those involved that, so as to make full use of the interval between meetings of the Conference to achieve an overall agreement satisfactory to all, it will be necessary to have launched all three sets of discussions within weeks of each other.

8. A first step towards getting related discussions under way in all three strands will be the opening, as soon as possible, of substantive talks between the parties in Northern Ireland under my chairmanship. These will commence with a round of bilateral meetings before moving on, as soon as possible, into plenary sessions. It has been agreed by all the participants that before long, when, after consultation, I judge that an appropriate point has been reached, I will propose formally that the other two strands should be launched. My judgement as to timing will be governed by the fact that all involved have agreed that the three sets of discussions will be under way within weeks of each other.

9. The internal talks, like the talks in the other strands, will follow a demanding and intensive schedule. In order to ensure a full airing of the issues, it will be open to each of the parties to raise any aspect of these relationships including constitutional issues, or any other matter which it considers relevant. All concerned have assured me that they

will ~~participate~~ in good faith and will make every effort to achieve progress.

10. It is accepted by all the parties that nothing will be finally agreed in any strand until everything is agreed in the talks as a whole and that confidentiality will be maintained thereunto. However, in the final analysis the outcome will need to be acceptable to the people.

Statement by the Government  
on Anglo-Irish Relations

The Government are extremely pleased that a basis now exists for the launch of political talks focussing on the totality of relationships within and between these islands.

The commitment and perseverance of all involved has kept the prospect of talks alive over these past fourteen months. The Government pay tribute to the personal qualities of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Mr. Brooke, and also to the combination of realism and vision displayed by the political leaders in Northern Ireland.

Without wishing to minimise the differences in positions, the Government believe there is now a genuine sense of common purpose among all the participants. As the Secretary of State said in the House of Commons today, we are setting out to achieve a new beginning for relationships within Northern Ireland, within the island of Ireland, and between the peoples of these islands. This shared appreciation of the nature and scope of the exercise undoubtedly helps to strengthen the prospects of a positive outcome to our endeavours.

Throughout these past fourteen months, the Government's concern has been to establish the soundest possible basis for talks and one which would be conducive to a successful outcome to the process. We shared the conviction that, unless the structures were right, the risk of failure of the substantive talks would be very high. It is for this reason that the two Governments - and indeed all the potential participants - have devoted so much time and attention to seeking to put proper structures in place.

The Government are acutely conscious that there is now a historic opportunity for both traditions on this island. Following decades of mistrust, agreement has been reached on the need for wide-ranging dialogue, where the full range of issues that divide and unite our two communities can be exhaustively explored. With goodwill and a constructive approach all round, there is potential for a qualitative leap forward in our relationship. Whatever the differences in perspective, and they undoubtedly exist, all of us in Ireland share the common objectives of peace, justice and prosperity for all our people.

The Government look forward to a substantive and vibrant dialogue with Northern political leaders, when we will listen carefully to the views of all participants while contributing fully ourselves. Our sensitivity to Unionist concerns will go hand in hand with a

- 3 -

forthright expression of the values and aspirations we share with Northern nationalists. We will seek to build for the future while ensuring that we do not put at risk what has been achieved and sustained over recent years.

Above all, it is the Government's hope that this sense of a new beginning will help to signal the end of the strife that has bedevilled Northern Ireland for so long. With the political process now offering the opportunity of a new way forward, the futility and irrelevance of violence must increasingly be apparent. Those who continue to give their support to campaigns of violence thereby exclude themselves from this process; the permanent cessation of such support must surely now be considered by all those who wish to participate in the building of a new, agreed Ireland.

Today's developments have brought renewed hope to people throughout this island. The Government are embarking on this ambitious exercise in a spirit of partnership, fully sharing the determination of all involved that our endeavours should prove worthy of the hopes invested in them.

26/3/91