



An Chartlann Náisiúnta **National Archives**

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EXTRACT FROM TEXT OF SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND,
MR PETER BROOKE'S ADDRESS TO THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY CONFERENCE

alleviating economic, social and environmental problems in the most disadvantaged areas of Belfast. A major initiative is also underway in Londonderry. In education, we have also provided for the first time in law that parents can choose to have their children educated in the same classroom as children from the other side of the community, and in schools which equally value both traditions in Northern Ireland. These so-called integrated schools are currently small in number, but are increasing year by year. In short, Government will continue to use all the means at our disposal to ensure equality of opportunity and equity of treatment.

But we must also address the fundamental political problems of Northern Ireland in

ways that satisfy the legitimate aspirations and interests of all her people - and in a way that denies any shred of moral justification to those who seek to achieve their political objectives by terror. Our search for such a settlement rests on a constitutional foundation that I do not believe any man or woman of good will can seriously challenge. It is this: Northern Ireland is a part of the United Kingdom in domestic and international law, and will not cease to be so without the consent of a majority of the people who live there. Let us be quite clear, therefore: Northern Ireland is no sort of colony occupied for strategic reasons or economic exploitation, but an integral part of our United Kingdom by the free choice of a majority of the people

who live there. So long as a majority wish to continue to remain part of the family of the United Kingdom - and there is no likelihood of their preference changing in the foreseeable future - then no one should entertain the slightest doubt about the wholehearted and total commitment of this Government to defending that choice, and doing all in our power to protect and further the interests of everyone who lives there. This Government will never shirk its responsibilities to the people of Northern Ireland.

Against this background, what I hope we can now do is to make further progress towards the better Governance of the Province in which it would be possible to transfer

greater political power, authority and responsibility to elected representatives of the people of Northern Ireland. There is a democratic deficit in Northern Ireland. Locally elected representatives carry too little responsibility. Greater local involvement would ensure - to an extent which direct rule from Westminster, however sensitive, cannot hope to achieve - that local priorities and concerns are properly reflected in decision making.

Towards that objective, we shall break down the communal divide more easily - and marginalise the terrorists more effectively - if we can promote agreement on structures which enable the elected representatives of the different parts of the community to work

together. Institutions in which local politicians can share real and extensive responsibility for their own affairs would be for the common good of all the people of Northern Ireland. Of course, I recognise that there are different ways of achieving this objective, and some speakers have referred to them in the debate today. However, the reality is that any policy, if it is to re-establish political stability in Northern Ireland, must pass two basic tests: it must stand a chance of working, and it must be widely acceptable throughout the community. While recognising the strong arguments which exist in favour of different approaches, on all the evidence available to me I am convinced that our approach is the

one that stands the best chance of passing those tests.

Hence a major objective will remain the search for agreement on a basis for fresh talks which can address all the issues relevant to the future government of Northern Ireland. I have no blueprint in mind. And I have no doubt that a major theme in any fresh talks will be the need to improve the scrutiny of Northern Ireland legislation, as well as the wider relationship between any new institutions in Northern Ireland and the Westminster Parliament. I do not exclude any proposals in these areas from consideration. But to secure the necessary widespread support, however, they must need to be pursued in the wider context of the talks process as a whole.

That wider context includes the "Irish Dimension" to the affairs of Northern Ireland. The history of our two countries has given us a unique relationship. It is only sensible for the two Governments to work closely together and discuss regularly those matters of mutual interest and concern. The Talks which took place earlier this year amply illustrate the extent to which all constitutional political parties involved wanted to address issues which could only be tackled and brought to a conclusion in discussions involving the Irish Government. This provided a further justification of the Government's view that a comprehensive political accommodation, acceptable to all,

policies some might think prudent. But their absence underlines the courage and relevance of our own colleagues in the Northern Ireland Conservative Associations in doing so, and of course this Conference can readily accept the addendum to this motion succinctly moved by Stephen Eyre, who is fighting to win one of the most beautiful constituencies in the United Kingdom. ?

The tragedies of Northern Ireland are our tragedies. Over the last few years - and I pay tribute to our predecessors - we have developed a consistent strategy linking social, economic and security policy with political progress. It is remorselessly addressing the horror of terrorism.