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FROM DEMOCRATIC STEERING

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Statement by The Friends of Ireland
St. Patrick's Day, 1993

On this St. Patrick's Day, the Friends of Ireland in the United States Congress join with all Irish Americans, and indeed Irish people everywhere, in celebrating Irish heritage and in calling for renewed efforts to achieve peace, reconciliation, and justice in Northern Ireland. We welcome the Prime Minister of Ireland, An Taoiseach Albert Reynolds, to Washington and look forward to working closely with him, with the Deputy Prime Minister, Tanaiste Dick Spring, and with their British counterparts, in seeking ways to achieve these ends over the coming years.

We also take special note of the recent gains made by the women of Ireland. The historic election of President Mary Robinson in 1990, the victories of twenty women in the recent parliamentary elections, and the appointment of the first woman to the board of directors of the International Fund for Ireland are all developments which will enhance the important role of women in the political life of Ireland.

Our concern for a peaceful and just solution in Northern Ireland springs not only from our personal commitment to Ireland but also from our awareness of the exceptional contributions that generations of Irish men and women have made to the building of this nation. The recent census records 44 million Americans who claim Ireland as the home of their forebears. It reminds us how significant an impact that small island has had on our nation and how disproportionate it has been to its size. It is a source of great sadness, therefore, that this celebration of our common Irish heritage is overshadowed by the continuing tragedy of violence in Northern Ireland.

On this day of Irish affection and friendship, the Friends of Ireland warmly welcome and endorse last year's round-table talks between the Irish and British governments and the constitutional parties in Northern Ireland. We reiterate our full support for the earliest possible renewal of such talks, and their ambitious objective of bringing about a new beginning for relationships within Northern Ireland, within Ireland, and between Ireland and the United Kingdom. The people of Northern Ireland today are crying out for an end to the bitterness and hatred of the past. They demand a political agreement that can bring an end to the violence. They know there can be no real political progress without genuine dialogue between those of all traditions who seek a constitutional way forward towards solving the problems of Ireland.

We unreservedly condemn the violence of the IRA and Loyalist paramilitary groups. Violence begets only more violence and, with it, a cycle of reprisal and revenge. We abhor the violence perpetrated by terrorists through their indiscriminate bombing and shooting campaigns and the misery they bring to ordinary people's lives. Such violence fosters division, bitterness, and distrust. It

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seeks to destroy the bridges between the two communities which are an essential avenue to a peaceful political compact by Irish men and women of all political persuasions or allegiances. We are convinced that terrorism will never bring justice and peace and so urge all terrorists to lay aside their arms if they truly wish to achieve their goals.

While recognizing that the primary responsibility for resolving the problems of Northern Ireland lies with the Irish and British governments as well as the constitutional parties in Northern Ireland, the Friends believe that the United States can play a constructive role in advancing the political process. We enthusiastically welcome the interest that President Clinton has shown in Irish affairs, and we join with him in offering our support as the people of Ireland search together to find a way forward. We share the view of the Taoiseach that the constructive interest and support of the President and Congress of the United States has the potential to be uniquely helpful. There should be thorough consultation to ensure that this concern is structured in the most effective and helpful manner possible.

The Friends of Ireland attach great importance to the continued and active implementation of the Anglo-Irish Agreement by the two governments. The Agreement, and in particular the role in Northern Ireland assigned to the Irish Government under it, has introduced a new dynamic into the situation through its effort to give formal recognition to the legitimacy and status of the political, economic, and social aspirations of the nationalist community. The Agreement should remain in force until transcended by new arrangements acceptable to the two governments and the constitutional parties in Northern Ireland.

We also continue to have serious concerns involving human rights, most particularly the murder of Irish men, women, and children from terrorist attacks. In addition, Amnesty International and Helsinki Watch have documented incidents involving the use of lethal force by the security forces, collusion between these forces and loyalists paramilitary groups, harassment of young nationalists by the British Army, and the denial of basic civil liberties. Such abuses must end, specific cases of abuse must be independently investigated, and those responsible must be punished.

Confidence in the forces of law and order, and in the impartial administration of justice, is fundamental to the construction of a just and peaceful society in Northern Ireland. We strongly urge the British Government, acting pursuant to consultations in the Anglo-Irish Conference, to put in place a series of measures to respond to the lack of confidence which so clearly exists in the nationalist community. A first step in this direction would be to ensure that all military patrols which come into contact with the public are accompanied by experienced and trained police officers, as agreed in the 1985 arrangements between the two governments.

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The British Government should also work to address the recommendations made in reports by Amnesty International, Helsinki Watch, and most recently, by the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, and the Committee on the Administration of Justice, which is based in Northern Ireland.

In addition, an end to discrimination in employment would help greatly to establish hope and confidence among the nationalist community, especially the young people. We are encouraged by the terms of the 1989 Fair Employment Act and support its implementation with all necessary powers to redress decades of discrimination.

The Friends are convinced that new investment from overseas can also be a positive catalyst for change. We are very pleased that Congressional support for the International Fund for Ireland has enabled it to play a constructive role in economic development, especially in the disadvantaged areas of both Northern Ireland and the border counties of the Republic. In fostering economic and social progress, and building a record of success through cooperation and incentive, the Fund is providing a measure of real hope for those who have suffered the most from the conflict in Northern Ireland. It has, most importantly, become a concrete force for reconciliation and healing through the creation of thousands of permanent jobs and with them, a constructive alternative for those who otherwise might have chosen the path of violence.

We believe the International Fund for Ireland with its independent Board jointly appointed by both governments can be a model for other efforts of cooperation and confidence-building between the two great traditions and the two political communities of Ireland. We welcome such initiatives that offer the prospect of reinforcing reconciliation among the Irish people.

We are hopeful that the process of healing and reconciliation can be advanced in Ireland over the next twelve months. It is now critical that both communities reach out to, and further reassure, one another. The Irish and British governments have the central responsibility to encourage and develop this process. In doing so, they will have our full and enthusiastic support. As Friends of Ireland, it is our dearest wish to see all of Ireland at peace, reconciled, and newly energized, free from the dissensions of the past, playing its full, distinctive, and dynamic part on the European and world stage.

On this St. Patrick's Day, the Friends of Ireland in the United States Congress join friends of Ireland everywhere in urging all parties to make special efforts this year to bring about peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland.

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