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# Sinn Féin

Nuacht ráiteas/News release

The following is the text of a statement by Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams. 9/10/95

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## Seeking Agreement

Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams, in his first major response to the election of UUP leader David Trimble has pointed out that the peace process "has to belong to all of the people of this island if it is to succeed" and that "dialogue is at the heart of peacemaking". Consequently, the Sinn Féin President appealed to Unionists "to engage positively and practically in the search for a lasting peace, by removing obstacles to inclusive dialogue and joining with the rest of us in consolidating the peace process, planning the process of negotiation, and securing an agreement which meets our diverse needs". Commenting on unionist rejection of the party's democratic mandate Mr Adams said: "Sinn Féin is a democratically mandated party. On that basis alone we are entitled to a presence at all-party talks.

Throughout the present peace process we have made abundantly clear on numerous occasions that we are totally committed to the democratic process. The achievement of peace must involve a permanent end to all violence.

We have made clear our commitment to, and wish for, dialogue involving both governments and all parties the objective of which would be an agreement among our divided people that would earn the allegiance of all traditions.

All of the statements we have made on these matters underline Sinn Féin's commitment to the democratic and peaceful process. It is self-evident that threats of any description from any quarter have no role in any such process. They are certainly no part of any talks process in which we will engage.

The time has come for the British government to call all-party talks now based on the democratic and peaceful process and fix a clear date for their commencement.

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### **The full text of Mr Adams comments:**

"Unionists speak often of democracy and demand that Sinn Féin prove its *'commitment to exclusively peaceful methods'*. Mr Trimble has made this point a number of times since his election. He reiterated it again following his recent visit to Dublin. Irish republicans could dismiss this demand because it is clearly a pretext for the unionist refusal to engage in inclusive dialogue and to accept the rights of others. Of course, we could all make excuses for not talking. All of us have reasons to be distrustful and suspicious. Sinn Féin has acknowledged the difficulties faced by our opponents but that does not mean that we accept that any of them have a right to demand that our commitment to real peace has to undergo some sort of test.

We could find many reasons for not talking to the Unionists. What of their stand on democracy and adherence to democratic principles? How real is it? What evidence can Irish nationalists look to and feel confident that unionism will seek an accommodation based on equality and democracy?

Unionism is an ideology, dependent on British patronage and founded on a denial of democracy - a denial of the Irish peoples right to national independence and the suppression of Irish nationalism. Unionism has consistently rejected the principle of equality, in employment, in housing, in economic investment and in political power. With weapons brought in with the collusion of the British political and military establishment - an event repeated 70 years later in the Nelson affair, when South African weapons were brought in by British Intelligence to enhance the killing capacity of the loyalist death squads - unionists rejected democratic principles and secured by threats and violence the artificial division of Ireland and the creation of a small loyalist homeland in which they were the absolute masters.

For 50 years, and with a permanent state of emergency in place, unionists built an unjust system of political, economic and social apartheid which two decades of British direct rule has failed to undo. The imposition of partition for Ireland has been disastrous. It affects the whole island. It saps our national morale and consciousness and actively retards our ability as a nation to shape all our affairs, to resolve the causes of poverty, emigration and unemployment, as well as the other more obvious causes of conflict.

Partition locks nationalists in the Six Counties into a state to which

they owe no allegiance. It ties unionists to a negative insular view of themselves and their future. The consequence of this is that unionists have fought against every effort, however minimalist, to establish equality. Unionism has a no-change attitude - what *it* has *it* holds - it rejects any suggestion of change to the status quo. We have a unique opportunity to put all this behind us.

However, it is clear that in Ireland and Britain and internationally there is a clear recognition that the present structures and policies have failed and that change - political and constitutional - is inevitable. Both governments are committed to seeking peace, stability and reconciliation by agreement among all the people who inhabit the island.

In this climate, created by the peace process, the new leader of the UUP, David Trimble, has a crucial role to play in determining the success or failure of the search for a lasting peace settlement.

Since his election Mr Trimble has visited London and Dublin. He will soon be in the White House. I think all of this is a good thing. The more unionists open up their attitude to public debate the sooner we can move to a democratic accommodation. The more they engage in dialogue the better for the rest of us.

Mr Trimble will now find his democratic credentials questioned. Will he acknowledge the undemocratic practices of unionism both past and present? Does he accept that the role of his party, and of the Orange Order of which he is a prominent leader, have been detrimental to the well being of people in the Six Counties? Will Mr Trimble set as his goals the removal of all injustices and inequalities? Will he repudiate discrimination in all its forms and support the demand for new legislation to make anti-discrimination laws effective? Will he instruct his party to adopt new policies in local councils which will put behind us the depressing spectacle, for example, of unionists abusing their power in Belfast City Council?

Will Mr Trimble accept that all sections of our people have the right to express their cultural identity through language, music, sport and all other means open to them? And will he endorse the democratic principle which seeks agreement and agreed structures for the island as a whole through a process of dialogue and co-operation based on full respect for the rights of all the people of Ireland?

The reality is that Unionism cannot continue to interpret democracy solely in terms of its own priorities and objectives and to the exclusion of all other views.

Seeking to promote and create a new unionist dominated Assembly, repackaging an old unionist proposition, will not build bridges of trust with nationalists. Despite the desire of some unionists to prevent change there will be no return to Stormont rule; no return of majoritarian politics and no internal six county based settlement. Such a scenario cannot provide peace.

Change is inevitable and unionist need to come to terms with that fact, just as they have to recognise Sinn Féin's electoral and democratic mandate. Predictably unionism seeks to ignore that which it dislikes. Sinn Féin stood in the last local government elections on the basis of our peace strategy. It is undoubtedly a source of some annoyance to the UUP that in Belfast in that election Sinn Féin won more votes than it did. But that is the reality and Mr Trimble must stop his efforts to rewrite democratic principles in the image of traditional unionism and accept Sinn Féin's right to represent those who vote for us.

It is that self-centred, sectarian and conservative attitude which has locked unionists into a larger mindset which has not changed for generations. It is an attitude which must be challenged from without unionism but also from within and as leader Mr Trimble must state clearly where he stands.

In contrast to Unionism's narrow view of democracy, its principles and the responsibilities which come with it, Sinn Féin's commitment to a democratic resolution has been repeatedly and publicly spelt out.

Sinn Féin is a democratically mandated party. On that basis alone we are entitled to a presence at all-party talks.

Throughout the present peace process we have made abundantly clear on numerous occasions that we are totally committed to the democratic process. The achievement of peace must involve a permanent end to all violence.

We have made clear our commitment to, and wish for, dialogue involving both governments and all parties the objective of which would be an agreement among our divided people that would earn the allegiance of all traditions.

In April 1993 in the first of my joint statements with SDLP leader John Hume we agreed that: **"everyone has a solemn duty to change the political climate away from conflict and towards a process of national reconciliation, which sees the peaceful accommodation of the differences between the people of Britain and Ireland and the Irish people themselves"**. Mr Hume and I accepted that the **"task of reaching agreement on a peaceful and democratic accord for all in this island"**, was our primary challenge. And we recognised that any agreement, **"is only achievable and viable if it can earn and enjoy the allegiance of the different traditions on this island, by accommodating diversity and providing for national reconciliation."**

Following the IRA cessation in August last year, the then Taoiseach Albert Reynolds, John Hume and myself in a joint statement in September spelt out our position; **"we are at the beginning of a new era in which we are totally committed to democratic and peaceful methods of resolving our political problems. We reiterate that our objective is an equitable and lasting agreement that can command the allegiance of all"**.

In July in a further joint statement between the Taoiseach John Bruton, the Tanaiste Dick Spring, John Hume and myself we reiterated **"our total and absolute commitment to democratic and peaceful methods of resolving political problems and our objective of an equitable and lasting agreement that can command the consent and allegiance of all."**

More recently the SDLP and Sinn Fein, in a comprehensive joint statement committed both parties to the pursuit of a permanent peace through the creation of **"institutions which have the loyalty of all sections of our people thus automatically removing the underlying causes of conflict and instability"**. And we stated our confidence that **"a democratic process can be designed to lead to agreement amongst the divided people of this island which will permit for continued political evolution and provide a solid base for peace"**.

Crucially the SDLP and Sinn Fein acknowledged that the **"process of building a lasting peace is a problematic and difficult one"**, which will require courage, flexibility and imagination.

Sinn Fein believes that the consent of all sections of our people can be obtained if the relevant parties but particularly the British and Irish

governments demonstrate the political will to achieve it. Unionists say Britain cannot deliver them to all-party talks. We accept that, but there is no denying the relationship between the unionists and the British government, and unionists can have no veto over the calling of all-party peace talks. Of course, they and anyone else have the right to decide when or if they want to attend.

I have always stressed the need for unionist involvement in the peace process. Peace is not possible without them. Efforts to marginalise or to ignore or to exclude the political opinions of others do not work. It is also undemocratic. So, every effort must be made to involve the unionists. A process of democratic inclusiveness built on an open dialogue of equality and respect of other opinions is essential.

How do we do that? We must constantly seek to engage with the unionists and encourage them to recognise that the pursuit of a real peace requires participation and partnership. Dialogue is the means by which the old taboos, antagonisms and fears can be banished and new ideas, new language and new accommodations can be agreed.

I would appeal to unionists to engage positively and practically in the search for a lasting peace, by removing obstacles to inclusive dialogue and joining with the rest of us in consolidating the peace process, planning the process of negotiation, and securing an agreement which meets our diverse needs.

All of the statements I have referred to underline Sinn Féin's commitment to the democratic and peaceful process. It is self-evident that threats of any description from any quarter have no role in any such process. They are certainly no part of any talks process in which we will engage.

Unionism has never needed a leader since the beginning of this century. After partition unionism needed only a safe pair of hands. There was no need to modernise or reconstruct or even examine the tenets of that ideology. Its future was secured because the rest of us were powerless. Now that has changed. There is no going back to the old days and unionism cannot afford to return to the old ways.

As leader of the Ulster Unionist Party David Trimble has the opportunity to lead his party into a future brimming over with potential. Of course, David Trimble may feel that he has only to build a more visible and positive profile for the UUP. If this is the case then

too will be squandering the best opportunity on offer to his section of our people.

The time has come for the British government to call all-party talks now based on the democratic and peaceful process and fix a clear date for their commencement.