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THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

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REMARKS BY THE VICE PRESIDENT
AND PRIME MINISTER JOHN BRUTON OF IRELAND
AT PRESENTATION OF SHAMROCKS

The Roosevelt Room

12:00 Noon EST

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Please be seated.

Taoiseach.

PRIME MINISTER BRUTON: It's an honor to present you, Vice President, with the Bowl of Shamrock to celebrate the national day of people of Irish heritage throughout the world, in this, the national capital of the country in which there are more people of Irish heritage than anywhere else in the world, including Ireland itself. (Laughter.)

St. Patrick's Day is, first and foremost, a religious celebration. On St. Patrick's Day we shouldn't forget that we're celebrating a former slave who brought Christianity to Ireland and, through Ireland, brought Christianity to much of the wider world. That religious tradition is common to almost all who live in Ireland, and indeed, who live in Britain as well. And its central message is one of reconciliation.

The violence in Northern Ireland today, the drive to dominate, and the continued urge to exploit the perfectly legitimate right to march for purposes of control over others are, each one of them, an insult to the Christian message brought to Ireland by St. Patrick 1,500 years ago.

Not everything is relative. There are some forms of politics that are bad. The violent politics of the Republican movement is bad. The domineering intransigence and blindness to others of some so-called Unionists in Northern Ireland is bad, too. Both should be condemned, first and foremost, from within their own communities.

I am visiting the United States this week, Mr. Vice President, to seek your help and that of the President and of all Americans for the reconstitution of a really honest peace process in Ireland. A peace process and a cease-fire that have no place for the continued targeting of victims, for continued knee-cappings or for veiled threats. This time the Irish people want a real cease-fire, one that will last -- one that will last because it springs from a full acceptance of the logic of peace.

- 2 -

The logic of peace requires a change of heart. The logic of peace means giving up traditional rights of domination. The logic of peace means apologizing -- apologizing for Bloody Sunday; also apologizing for the Remembrance Day bombing in Enniskillen, and apologizing for every shooting, every maiming, and every bombing that was done in the last 27 years.

The logic of peace means being confident enough to give up the military mind-set; to give up the sense of security that comes from controlling a neighborhood through intimidation; and being ready to give up the delusion that peace can ever be compatible with the retention of Kalashnikovs and Sem-techs. The logic of peace means being the first one to take a risk and not waiting for cast-iron guarantees from others.

The logic of peace requires, above all, that radical action be taken to end religious and political sectarianism in Northern Ireland. In a brilliant speech to the American-Ireland Fund dinner last week, Senator George Mitchell said of the two communities in Northern Ireland -- and I quote: "They remain deeply divided along sectarian lines. They are suspicious and hostile. They mistrust each other. Until that changes, we will not have true peace."

Separate development, whether voluntary or compulsory, is not the way forward. It never works. It didn't work elsewhere in the world. Young people should be brought together in Northern Ireland a lot more. And that should start in the schools and on the playing fields and in the playing halls. People who lead separate lives as young people will not easily grow together. Ending sectarianism and building trust are the most important values in Northern Ireland at this stage in its history. The process of building trust can never start too soon.

Saint Patrick, who was a foreigner, a man from Britain, indeed, was able to win the trust of Irish people precisely because he spent every hour of every day for a large part of most of his young life living on the side of a mountain in Northern Ireland mixing with Irish people. The same approach is needed if the sectarian divisions of which Senator Mitchell spoke are to be removed. Young Catholics and young Protestants in Northern Ireland need to spend many, many hours of every day together in one another's company. That requires more than gestures; it requires a change of philosophy.

Mr. Vice President, the United States is the world's greatest example of true internal peace based on reconciliation. You have brought nationalities together. You have educated them together. You have not asked them to give up their distinctive heritage. But you have asked them to accept common institutions -- the institutions of the United States, institutions that are fair to all. That is my ambition for Northern Ireland -- an ambition that can and will be fulfilled by the talks chaired by Senator George Mitchell, which resume on the 3rd of June.

And on that note, Mr. Vice President, may I present you with the shamrock.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much. Thank you. (Applause.) Thank you very much. Thank you. Well, Taoiseach, thank you very much for a very powerful statement.

- 3 -

Mrs. Bruton, members of the Irish delegation, and Ambassador Jean Kennedy-Smith, Sandy Berger and other distinguished guests who are present: It is a great honor for me to be able to accept this bowl of shamrocks today, and it's a great pleasure to welcome you back to the White House. Thank you very much for being here and for the very gracious presentation and the very powerful words that you've just delivered.

You know, the first Irish American paper in our country was called "The Shamrock" and was founded in 1810. Its commitment to its readers was -- and I quote -- "to unite Americans and Irishmen by a bond of friendly intercourse and political amity, having for its object the general good." So the shamrock has long symbolized the flourishing ties of friendship between America and Ireland.

As you remarked, Taoiseach, when the President visited Dublin, the story of the Irish in America is the story of America itself. You put it well, and that's so true. And it's been a full year since we last shared this celebration, and it's been a full year in every sense of the phrase for the United States and Ireland. The American people were proud to welcome President Robinson to our nation last June, and in September you gave an historic address before a joint session of our Congress. And throughout the latter half of this year, as Ireland held the presidency of the European Union, our two nations have worked together as closely as ever to meet our common challenges and shape our common future.

We've also continued our steady support for the peace process in Northern Ireland. The Belfast talks that began last June are currently in recess for the British and local election campaigns. These historic negotiations offer real hope for achieving a lasting peace. The Irish and British governments, as well as our own, agree that the talks stand the best chance for success if all the elected parties are at the table.

But violence can have not voice in this process. In order for the talks to be inclusive, the IRA must declare and implement an unequivocal cease-fire. If they do, I believe that Sinn Fein will be invited to participate in the talks.

We're all aware that this has been a difficult year for peace. But under the fine chairmanship of Senator George Mitchell and his colleagues, the talks have made some useful progress. When the parties reconvene in June, it is important that they move quickly into substantive negotiations. I hope they all return to the table determined to press ahead, and I urge all political leaders to do their part to make that happen.

This is a responsibility that every citizen must share. Those of us in government can be catalysts for change, but lasting results demand the engagement of every group in society: churches, civic groups, business leaders, teachers. The walls of distrust people carry in their minds must also be dismantled.

As the Taoiseach said so eloquently before our Congress, living with difference is the challenge people must meet not just in Northern Ireland, but all around the world. You added some new profound words to those sentiments in your statement here today. And allow me to say I am very proud of the role Americans have played in

- 4 -

promoting this challenge of living with difference, and I'm proud of the role that Americans have played in the Northern Ireland peace process. And I speak not only of Senator Mitchell but Irish Americans here who have worked open new channels of communication and who have worked to support a peaceful democratic path to a settlement that endures.

We're less than two weeks away from Easter Monday, a time of healing and redemption. But it also marks the start of the marching season, which last year led to bitter confrontations that cost the people of Northern Ireland, in terms of money, momentum, and morale. On behalf of the President, let me express the hope that on all sides can show restraint this time around. Being proud of one's community is an honorable thing. But people simply have to accept that you cannot define your own greatness by trying to make others feel small; nor can you honor your own beliefs by trying to prevent others from worshipping.

There are widows and orphans in both communities; families whose loved ones have served time in prison; parents who can't find a job. Both sides have suffered terribly. Both sides want the suffering to end. For too long, the people of Northern Ireland have been partners in pain and sorrow. Now, they must seize the opportunity to live as partners in peace.

This isn't easy work, but we cannot afford pessimism. Just look at how far we have come just in the last few years, compared to the troubled history of the previous quarter century. But neither can the people of Northern Ireland afford intransigence or delay. We need to keep pushing for progress.

Prime Minister Bruton, I know you share this commitment, and I want to thank you for your leadership. Especially today, on this day of celebration for all people of Irish heritage, let us renew our conviction and confidence and help bring a just and lasting peace to the land of our ancestors and St. Patrick. Thank you for coming today. And thank you again for the shamrock. (Applause.)

Thank you. We'll take a few questions.

Q Mr. Vice President, are you saying that Sinn Fein should be allowed into the talks on June 3rd without any movement on arms decommissioning?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, first of all, the IRA must declare a cease-fire. And I want to express, and do again express, the conviction that following a cease-fire by the IRA, Sinn Fein would be invited to participate in the talks. I think everyone understands that that would be the case. And I express the hope again that that will occur.

Q Mr. Vice President, could I ask you, did you give a commitment to the Taoiseach today that Senator Mitchell would be back to chair the talks on their resumption?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Oh, yes, he'll be banging the gavel and presiding when the talks resume on June 3rd.

- 5 -

Q Mr. Vice President, Senator Kennedy said that the British government should say that Sinn Fein would be allowed into the talks on June 3rd when they resume as long as there is a cease-fire and without any further preconditions. Is that something you would subscribe to and would you suggest to the British government that they say something like that?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, that's a decision for the British government to make. These are all delicate matters. And there are ways to signal that thought without encountering the kinds of problems which they evidently fear that might make them reluctant to spell it out explicitly.

But let me say, again, on behalf of President Clinton and the United States of America, that we have the absolute conviction and certainty that should the IRA declare a cease-fire, then Sinn Fein would be invited to participate in the talks. Now, how that expression comes from others is for them to decide.

Q Taoiseach, you talked about the need for trust. Many things can inhibit the growth of trust, and perhaps none more so than tragic events of the past left to fester. In relation to Bloody Sunday, when I spoke to you on Saturday, you spoke about new evidence coming forward which has a major impact, and you also said you had spoken to John Major and received certain assurances. Now we see the clear evidence in the Sunday Business Post. Do you regard it as significant enough to warrant a new inquiry into Bloody Sunday?

PRIME MINISTER BRUTON: This evidence, if verified, is very significant. It suggests that there was a very high degree of deliberation involved in the killings that occurred. Obviously, until it is fully assessed and the entire case is assembled, I'm not going to come to a judgment as to precisely what the next step should be. I am anxious to ensure that we are seeing to go through this matter in a form of due process, assembling all of the evidence, examining all of it together, rather than coming to conclusions on the part, on the basis of individuals pieces of evidence. But, yes, I think that the evidence is quite serious and justifies a radical reassessment.

I make the point, however, in general, that the victims of Bloody Sunday, like the other victims, need to be heard. They need to have their pain felt and understood by others, because it is only when that happens the day can begin to forgive. And it is only when people begin to forgive that it's the beginning of reconciliation. And it is only with reconciliation that there will be lasting peace.

So this process of bringing up terrible things that may have happened in the past is not a negative process, it's a constructive process; it's a process leading ultimately toward healing.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Thank you all very much.

Q Mr. Vice President, do you plan on going to Ireland in the next year?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, I'd certainly love to, but -- (laughter) -- but are you trying to broker an invitation for me?

- 6 -

PRIME MINISTER BRUTON: Could I Intervene here and invite the Vice President to come to Ireland this year. (Laughter and applause.)

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much.

PRIME MINISTER BRUTON: Now, you're on the spot.
(Laughter.)

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much. Thank you all.

END

12:20 P.M. EST