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PEACE AND THE HEALING PROCESS

JOHN HUME MP, MEP

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Politics as a healing profession is the theme of my address this evening.

In one of the most famous pieces of political oratory - the Gettysburg Address, - Abraham Lincoln spoke at the end of a bloody civil war about binding the wounds of the nation. This is probably the most famous example of medical analogies being used to describe problems being suffered by, or processes being proffered to, the body politic.

It is not uncommon to hear people despair about the cancer of sectarianism or racism. References are made to paralysis, situations haemorrhaging, crippling effects, pain, hurt, trauma, fractures, mental scars and prognoses in many political commentaries, not only in situations where violence is, or has been, waging.

Over the years I have often talked of Ireland's need for a "healing process" and cautioned against notions of "instant cures". On numerous occasions I have found myself advising people to diagnose and treat causes of our political condition instead of scratching or picking at symptoms.

Medical or health analogies are particularly understandable in the context of a dysfunctional polity. They probably proliferate especially in circumstances where such political dysfunctionality manifests itself in violence creating trauma which is all too real and literal.

The medical profession has to treat the consequences of such violence. In our own situation it has done so with distinction, dedication and determined cooperation spanning all levels and branches of the profession and associated professions. From my perspective the political profession has to identify, isolate and treat the causes of such conflict. Unfortunately a comparable concerted effort involving all politicians to match the response to challenge by the clinicians has not yet been brought about - yet!

This can partly be explained by the fact that violence itself generates secondary political malignancies and complications. As Martin Luther King said:- "Violence as a way of achieving justice is both impractical and immoral. It is impractical because it is a descending spiral ending in destruction for all. The old law of an eye for an eye leaves everybody blind. It is immoral because it seeks to humiliate the opponent rather than win his understanding; it seeks to annihilate rather than convert. Violence is immoral because it thrives on hatred rather than love. It destroys community and makes brotherhood impossible. It leaves society in monologue rather than dialogue".

Recognising that violence can only frustrate what we want to further and end up destroying what it starts out claiming to defend we must see if we can isolate violence itself. The effects of violence were preventing and undermining successful treatment of our underlying problem. Only by securing total relief from violence could we progress from monologue to the dialogue which is needed to treat our problem and help us towards the healing process.

Securing relief from the harrowing and debilitating secondary condition or symptoms does not constitute a cure. Nor does it lessen the need to go on to deal with the underlying problem. We need to be resolved rather than reluctant about moving on to the other phases or episodes of treatment and care without which we cannot have a healthy outcome. That is why I am concerned about the lack of movement in this welcome absence of violence by the British Government which is supposed to be a sponsor of the process at hand.

I can understand fears, misgivings and nervousness about the process ahead. It will be uncomfortable for all of us but we have no alternative course to stability. People want cured but we do not like undergoing operations, just like people want to go to heaven but nobody wants to die. It is surprising what some people will tolerate in terms of toothache before submitting to a dentist.

I suppose we have a particular phobia about losing something. In our situation those in all traditions have an innate fear about having to give something up even if it is only vestigial. Anyone planning a successful intervention should be sensitive to such fears without being completely constrained by them. Feeding fears will not build confidence and comfort necessary for us to undergo and undertake the appropriate interventions and exercises.

As you can tell by now I am given to the idea that politics is concerned with healing the wounds of society, just as you heal the wounds of individuals. Given the attitudes of many people towards politics and its practitioners, this might seem an exaggerated or downright presumptuous claim. Nevertheless, I would argue strongly that healing is what politics should be about.

Of course, conflict and division is the foundation of politics, just as disease and injury is an essential prerequisite for the medical profession. If there were no divisions and difference of opinion in society, there would be no need for politics, just as there would be no need for doctors if there was no illness.

But just as no doctor welcomes disease or injury for the sake of it, no politician should welcome conflict. To do otherwise is to betray the trust our fellow citizens put in us.

There are a number of similarities between medicine (in which as a layman I include surgery) and politics which I would like to consider for a few moments. There are also considerable

differences which I will examine afterwards.

First, we have a common interest in healing. While you heal individuals, we as politicians have to deal with the defects of society. While you tackle disease and injury, we have to deal with the problems of poverty, unemployment, and in much of the world, violence. Of course, it would be naive to believe that there is no connection between the individual illnesses you treat and the social ills we as politicians have to address.

Second, I think we have a common awareness of the limitations of our knowledge and powers. Despite the great progress made over the years, there are still diseases which cannot be cured, there are still great social evils we have yet to overcome. Indeed, the great successes of the past are not irreversible. No advance is permanent. Each step forward has to be fought for again and again. It is not realistic to expect miracle cures. We cannot resolve immediately all the problems we face. But we can play a part in paving the way for eventual solutions.

That is why we have to take a long-term approach, playing our part in developments whose beneficiaries will be future generations. We have to do our best to make breakthroughs, to build on existing achievements and to prepare the future. We cannot necessarily offer the Promised Land but we should be pointing in the right direction.

As far as the differences are concerned, the major one is the respectful gap between achievement and aspiration in our respective professions. While the medical profession has a solid record of achievement, politics and politicians often fail to live up to their aspirations. The outline above of the nature of politics obviously contains a degree of aspirational thinking on my own part rather than being simply a description of politics as it is today. That is not necessarily a criticism since politics is the realm par excellence of aspiration, and without it we would still be living in caves.

The problem occurs when politicians decide that their role is simply to articulate and reflect the divisions in society. In a divided society such as ours in Ireland, every public representative is, to a greater or larger extent, a reflection of the deep divisions that exist. That is inescapable but one does not have to resign oneself to such a limited role, or even worse, make one's *raison d'être*. There is a challenge to extend ourselves to leadership rather than to content ourselves with spokespersonship alone.

Unlike doctors, we do not have to swear an oath to do no harm. It probably would not solve anything if we did, given that the divisions in our society mean that oaths are contentious in themselves. But I believe that the real purpose of politics, and the justification of political leadership, is to find ways of overcoming such divisions. Our moral duty is to find a way in which the people of this divided island can agree on how to share it and to begin the process of healing.

A further substantial difference between politics and medicine is the relative weight given to diagnosis. A doctor uses the symptoms to diagnose the illness, too many politicians use the symptoms to ignore the underlying political problems. The cycles of violence which have so disfigured our history perpetuated themselves because they were seen as the problem, not as a symptom of a general political failure to create adequate political institutions. In this divided island only institutions which will accommodate the different traditions on the island can guarantee a peaceful and democratic future. We need institutions which allow for the expression rather than the suppression of difference.

I have spent many years stressing the need for a serious diagnosis of the nature of the problem in Ireland, for which there was often much criticism. But I was, and remain, convinced that without an adequate definition of the problem and some degree of consensus on the diagnosis, it is impossible to treat it. Without some minimum degree of agreement on the nature of the problem, we would be restricted to the political equivalent of using leeches. Indeed, I would argue that the progress made so far towards a peaceful island has been greatly facilitated by the gradual development of a minimal consensus on diagnosis, though quite naturally the prescriptions remain extremely diverse.

I would also like to point out one other major difference between politics and surgery. We operate without anaesthesia, even though some political leaders see themselves as amateur anaesthetists. It is not the job of public representatives to provide unjustified reassurance to their supporters. It is our job to tell our supporters that we have serious problems to overcome and that can only be done if we are all prepared to engage in a radical re-examination of our presuppositions and prejudices and inherited hatreds. We should refuse to even offer prospect of pseudo-anaesthesia, it is our duty to inform and convince our fellow citizens of the need to take an active part in the creation of a new dispensation in our divided Ireland. This is perhaps the equivalent of the important role of Health Education and awareness programmes.

Bearing this in mind, I would like to emphasise a certain number of principles which have been important in the peace process so far, and indeed form the basis of the success so far achieved in silencing the guns. These principles will continue to underpin our strategy in the future.

First, we must address the problem of difference. There are three options in the face of difference: to pretend it does not exist; to combat such differences; or to accommodate them. We have seen the failure of the Stalinist attempt to pretend that difference either does not exist or is an irrelevance. We have all been sickened by the efforts of the warlords in ex-Yugoslavia to eradicate difference by killing and ethnic cleansing. In Ireland, the eradication of difference has been a regrettable part of our history. We have also suffered from the activities

of those who thought that being Irish or British was a matter of life and death and who were prepared to make sure that it was. It seems to me therefore that the only rational, human and realistic course of action is to try to seek arrangements which will allow different traditions to live together while preserving their identities. The only sensible way forward is to accept difference as inevitable and see it as a basic and a natural principle of human society. Indeed, with their advances in DNA analysis, we have the scientific proof that difference is universal. We must cherish the diversity of cultures which exist in Ireland, and seek to preserve them and the equilibrium between them.

In this respect, we can draw a great deal of inspiration from the existence of the European Union as living proof that a solution can be found. The European Union is the greatest ever example of conflict resolution in human history. The fact that countries which had spent centuries invading, occupying, expelling and massacring each other came together freely to put aside their past hatreds. They came together to work in their common interests and to ensure that war could no longer be a way to settling their differences. This in itself would have been remarkable but the fact that these countries still preserve their identities is even more encouraging. It proves that it is possible to establish institutions which allow for common policies without submerging the variety of cultures and traditions which are real riches. The experience of the EU therefore affords a good many lessons for those of us who still have to deal with the consequences of difference being perceived as a threat, both in Ireland and further afield. Without seeking to impose a particular political blueprint, I am convinced that there is much which can be adapted from the EU for our eventual domestic use.

The second principle is that force, or the threat of force, is not a useful method of dealing with difference. Indeed, it often reinforces identities which might otherwise be only a minor part of a person's life. The use of force also generates more force, creating the vicious cycle of an eye for an eye. The use of violence merely makes problems more intractable as I have indicated earlier.

Third, differences can only be accommodated by dialogue and agreement. The basis for the ceasefires by both loyalists and republicans is the acceptance of this principle. Those organisations previously involved in violence now agree that only through negotiation can a suitable settlement be worked out. Neither side can force the other to accept the unacceptable. The peace has held because of the common commitment to agreement. It is time we moved on to serious talks on the content of an eventual political accord supported by all traditions in Ireland.

Fourth, we must be imaginative about political structures. No one should be scared of political change per se, though clearly change must be brought about by agreement. But change is as fundamental to human society as diversity. Without it,

stagnation is inevitable. Stagnation itself is a cause of conflict just as its biological equivalent causes degeneracy and disease.

It is also necessary to ensure that political institutions are adapted to the needs of citizens rather than mould the citizen to suit the purposes of the institutions. In a divided society, it is therefore vital that the institutions reflect the needs and aspirations of all sections of society. Creating institutions which can command the consent of all citizens of whatever identity is not a simple task, but there is no doubt that it can be done. In many countries, there are complex political arrangements which are not that easy to understand as an outsider but which command the support of the overwhelming majority of their citizens.

We should not be afraid of complexity and diversity in our political systems. Complexity and diversity are increasingly recognised by scientists as the crucial organising factors in the natural world. Why shouldn't it be the same in the social and political world. If anything, society and the political system should be even more complex than the natural world. We should not be worried about creating complex political structures if their purpose and effect is to create an inclusive system capable of securing the allegiance of all citizens of all traditions. What we should denounce are systems, simple or complex, which serve to exclude citizens of any or all traditions from the decision-making process.

Where does this leave us. The most urgent requirement now is to overcome the obstacles to comprehensive all-party negotiations. Though we have succeeded in putting a stop to violence, we have yet to make the peace.

There is a long way to go before a political settlement can be concluded to which all sections of our divided people can give their allegiance. Such a settlement will be necessary if our people are to look forward to a future where all our energies are devoted to overcoming the massive political, economic and social challenges facing our society. We have to ensure that the conflict which has so disfigured our society becomes and remains a distant and tragic memory.

To achieve this goal will take a great deal of effort. It will require all of us to examine our traditional assumptions and preconceptions. It will take a lot of hard thinking and tough talking. It will require serious negotiations in which all relevant parties to the conflict engage in the overriding task of finding new political arrangements which will reflect the interests and aspirations of all traditions in Ireland. The keys to the eventual political understanding for which all our people are crying out can therefore be easily identified: the need for a speedy beginning to all-inclusive negotiations; and the recognition that an acceptable political system can only be created by agreement. There is no place for any form of duress, physical or moral, in the creation of new genuinely democratic

institutions. Nor is there any room for the type of thinking which is dominated by notions of victory and defeat. The successful creation of an Ireland at peace and striving for prosperity can only be a victory for all traditions, just as violence, conflict, and the absence of peace are a defeat for us all.

It is also clear that the need for agreement on the future of Northern Ireland is generally accepted by all parties and by the Irish and British governments. The Downing Street Declaration made this clear, as have subsequent comments by the various parties and the two governments. The task is now for the divided peoples of Ireland to work out an agreement on the ways in which we can share our island. Both governments have made it clear that they accept the right of our people to define their own future political institutions and that their wishes will not be overridden by either state. The British government, for instance, has made it clear that it has no selfish or strategic motive to hold on to Northern Ireland against the will of its people. It is up to us, the people of Ireland, North and South, unionist and nationalist, to map out an agreement.

Having said that, it is important that the opportunity to create political agreement in Ireland for the first time is seized as rapidly as possible. We therefore believe that all-inclusive talks should take place at the earliest possible date. We do not think it is helpful to impose pre-conditions on such talks, since the whole purpose of negotiating is to surmount the difficulties which the pre-conditions undoubtedly reflect. We prefer to address the underlying conditions from which pre-conditions emerge, concentrating on the problem rather than the symptoms.

The crucial task is to take the gun out of Irish politics for once and for all. The only way we can do that is to tackle the problems of division, mistrust, and hatred which led people to resort to violence in the first place.

Since the cessations of violence, the major preliminary question has been answered. Groups formerly committed to the use of force have made it clear that they are prepared to enter into negotiations on the understanding that they are determined to use exclusively peaceful and political methods to pursue their objectives. That is the major touchstone for all-inclusive negotiations. We believe that no serious government or political force in these islands could fail to seize this unprecedented opportunity.

While we are convinced that all-inclusive negotiations are the only possible route to peace, we do not underestimate the difficulties involved in bringing about a successful conclusion. Clearly, the parties involved have considerable difference of opinion which will not be changed overnight. Our history of violence and conflict has left many wounds which will not easily heal. The extent of poverty and deprivation has alienated many people of all traditions from the political process. We do not have a culture of negotiation and agreement.

But we are totally convinced that an eventual political agreement is feasible and can be brought to fruition. Three reasons can be cited: the underlying common interests of our citizens; international support for the peace process; and the emergence of political agreements in other divided societies throughout the world.

Despite our political differences, our traditions have a common interest in peace and in economic prosperity. There is a vast area of economic and social policy where our divided peoples are united and where we can work together without compromising on deeply and sincerely held convictions. We can spill our sweat and not our blood and so build the necessary trust to heal our deeper divisions. As a peripheral region of the European Union, we have a common interest in adopting a united approach to our European partners just as we have such a common interest in our relations with the rest of the world. We have a common interest in developing our economic position within the global economy and in establishing fair patterns of trade in international markets. The more we get used to pursuing our common interests, the more we can address our political divisions.

Second, the support and goodwill of our friends in the European Union, the US and the Commonwealth is an asset of enormous value. The interest shown in the peace process in the outside world is very help in building confidence among our peoples and in combatting the tendency to think in narrow and self-defeating terms. Seeing how diverse peoples throughout the world have ordered their affairs is a useful corrective against an excessively Anglo - or Hiberno-centric view of the world.

Finally, the emergence of peace processes in divided societies in other parts of the world is a massive boost for confidence in the possibility of negotiated agreements. I am thinking for instance of South Africa where the work of Nelson Mandela and F W de Klerk has produced an agreement far more successful than anyone thought possible even two years ago. We will have to find our own way, just as South Africa did. The real lesson we take is that, given sufficient determination and imagination, political structures which respect diversity and difference and which reconcile former enemies, are possible and indeed the only path to peace.

Just as with many medical interventions and treatments we cannot guarantee that there is absolutely no risk. But without taking a course with its element of possible risk there may be no hope of recovery.

We are gathered here on the day of Yitzhak Rabin's funeral. He grew from being a brave soldier to being a brave statesman. He latterly embraced in the Middle East the profound value of what Olof Palme tried to tell the Cold War world - we can only truly be secure with each other, not against each other. With Shimon Peres, Yasser Arafat and others he took risks for peace, just as he took personal risks in war. Indeed a public exhortation of the need to take risks for peace were among his last words at the

peace rally where he was assassinated.

As we think of this man who has helped to build peace in the Promised Land and offer our hope and help for peace in that region, we can usefully reflect on some words from another assassinated leader. One who said on the eve of his death, " ..I have seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know that we as a people will get to the promised land".

On an earlier occasion Martin Luther King offered counsel which is valuable for the motivation and morale of clinicians and politicians alike and relevant to frustrations now being experienced - "We must accept finite disappointment, but we must never lose infinite hope".

He also challenged all of us to reach beyond the confines of our given orthodoxies or our own local and subjective perspectives and to embrace mutual acceptance and human solidarity. He offered a most meaningful interpretation for health and wealth in this world and at the same time tried to rally us above notions of narrow nationalism. With words that are a most appropriate reference for an international health lecture Martin Luther King said:

"As long as there is poverty in the world I can never be rich, even if I have a billion dollars. As long as diseases are rampant and millions of people in this world cannot expect to live more than twenty-eight or thirty years, I can never be totally healthy even if I just got a good checkup at Mayo Clinic. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. This is the way our world is made. No individual or nation can stand out boasting of being independent. We are interdependent".