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Stormont Castle, Belfast  
10 February 1977

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the Rt Hon Roy Mason, MP, said in the Commons today that if the political parties in the Province showed willingness to work together, they would not find him slow to respond.

Mr Mason was replying to questions about the political situation in Northern Ireland from Mr John Biggs-Davison, MP (Epping Forest), Mr Martin Flannery, MP (Sheffield, Hillsborough), Mr John Watkinson, MP (West Gloucestershire), Mr Michael McNair-Wilson, MP (Newbury) and Mr Nick Budgen, MP (Wolverhampton South West).

The Secretary of State said:-

"At their request I met representatives of the Social Democratic and Labour Party on 31 January and the Official Unionist Party on 1 February. At both meetings I emphasised that the first requirement for political or constitutional progress was for the parties to demonstrate a willingness to seek agreement with each other.

"The Government wish to see the establishment of a system of devolved government which commands widespread acceptance throughout both parts of the community in Northern Ireland and which provides for participation and partnership by representatives of both communities. I believe that the people of Northern Ireland share that wish and that they are looking to their political leaders to rise above narrow party interests and to work together in the greater interest of Northern Ireland. Given the willingness to work together I will play my part and I am sure the constitutional questions can then be resolved.

"The first step is for the parties to talk together. The idea of administrative non-legislative devolution may not satisfy all the aspirations of the parties, but it could provide a subject for discussion to see what could grow from it. I do not exclude interim arrangements for partial devolution provided that they involve some real power and responsibility and are not merely advisory.

"If the parties show willingness to work together they will not find me slow to respond".

The Secretary of State also answered a series of questions about his Dublin discussions with members of the Government of the Irish Republic.

The questions were asked by Mr Michael O'Halloran, MP (Islington North), Mr Van Straubenzee, MP (Wokingham) and Mr Neville Sandelson, MP (Hillingdon, Hayes and Harlington), and in reply Mr Mason said:-  
"In my first visit to Dublin as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on 24 January, I had full and wide-ranging discussions with Dr FitzGerald, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and other Irish Ministers. I paid a courtesy call on the Taoiseach.

"The visit allowed me to establish a direct relationship with the Government of the Republic of Ireland and to discuss areas of mutual interest in a friendly and constructive manner".