

# NATIONAL ARCHIVES

## IRELAND



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Steering Note for Ministers Travelling to the United States

1. In addition to the Taoiseach, who is paying an official visit to Washington DC, several Ministers are travelling to the United States during the St. Patrick's Day season this year. This is in furtherance of the Government's policy of developing good relations with the Irish-American community on the basis of mutual respect as well as promoting a supportive awareness on the part of US Administration, Congress and American public opinion generally about Irish policies and our policy on Northern Ireland in particular. The Government will also be represented at the Kennedy Library Symposium on Northern Ireland in Boston on 14, 15 March.
2. It is suggested that Ministers, while maintaining a firm and clear opposition to support of any kind for violence in Northern Ireland by any Irish-Americans should, in the interest of maintaining a dialogue with Irish-Americans on the one hand, and denying control of sections of Irish-American opinion to supporters of violence on the other:
- demonstrate pride in the achievements of the Irish-American community
  - interest in their concerns,
  - appreciation of their legitimate wish to help Ireland and the nationalist section of the community in Northern Ireland
- and emphasise the hopes of constitutional Irish nationalists that the efforts of the New Ireland Forum to develop ideas which would promote peace and stability in Northern Ireland will succeed.
3. Many of the most vociferous critics of Irish Government policy about Northern Ireland among a small minority of the Irish-American community are themselves persons of Irish birth who emigrated during the past forty years. Part of their attitude is a sense of grievance directed against successive Governments for failing, as they would see it, to create job opportunities for them at home. Their anti-British attitude reflects an exacerbated case of the inherited notion that "Britain is the source of all our ills". Their distance from the problem is also reflected in a complete unawareness of, or unwillingness to acknowledge, the complexities posed by the Unionist realities.
4. A specifically American feature of the attitude of some Irish-Americans to our policy derives from the classic American reflex which looks

for actions rather than words. NORAIID and similar groups have found it easy to fill this need. Successive Irish Governments have hitherto found it difficult to direct this urge for action in a concrete direction; this has been particularly and increasingly true during the period of political vacuum i.e. since May 1974. In other words, when real political progress is taking place in or concerning Northern Ireland, it is far easier to mobilise Irish-American opinion positively and to sideline the vociferous minority of IRA supporters. The condemnation of U.S. support for violence, particularly by U.S. national leaders of Irish descent (The Friends of Ireland etc.) has been influential but it would have greater effect, as would a similar message from the Irish Government, if backed by the reality of progress on the ground.

This is one reason why the work of the New Ireland Forum is of central importance in Ministers' efforts this year to relaunch the dialogue with the Irish-American Community.

5. Irish-Americans have often out of a sense of frustration with the failure of politicians to make progress, tended to underestimate the concern and the commitment of the Irish Government to improve the lot of the nationalist minority in Northern Ireland. It is suggested that this concern and this commitment deserve special emphasis.
6. In general it is suggested that the following themes should be taken up by Ministers, either in their set-piece remarks to or other exchanges with the Irish-American community:
  - Importance of relationship between Ireland and America, a unique relationship based not on cold diplomatic factors, but on people, ties of blood and friendship;
  - Appreciation of historic and present importance of America to Ireland;
  - Welcome for concern by Irish-Americans about Irish problems and especially Northern Ireland tragedy;
  - The major constitutional nationalist groups in Ireland are engaged in an enterprise, the New Ireland Forum, which is unprecedented in the affairs of any country: a major attempt by Government, Opposition and SDLP to confront the difficult realities of the problem together and come up with ideas which would help to create peace and stability;

- Many had derided the Forum when it began its work; now it is taken very seriously indeed by all concerned: the British especially;
- The Government is activated by a real concern and commitment concerning the minority in Northern Ireland; determined that they will not continue to be excluded from influence over their own lives; determined that their Irish identity, so disastrously left out of account by the arrangements that followed Partition, will be given full expression in a New Ireland;
- The Irish people, through the Forum, are also facing up to the difficult reality of the other Irish tradition, that of the Northern Unionists; their identity and concerns must also be accommodated in the new Ireland;
- Irish-Americans can, and many do, help; the Report of the New Ireland Forum will soon be available; we hope the entire Irish-American community will study it and bring it to the attention of their media and leaders;
- Irish-Americans can also help by contributing to the many fund-raising efforts which make life a little more bearable in Northern Ireland;
- Contributions to violence or supporters of violence are wrong and destructive;
- Some people who contribute probably do not realise that they are causing real misery and suffering;
- Violence in a divided society makes the central task of healing divisions very much more difficult;
- Our basic message from Ireland is one of new hope for peace.

7. Irish officials in the US will themselves be heavily engaged in the demands of what is the busiest season of the year for them. but they are available to all Ministers for briefing and any other assistance.

Department of Foreign Affairs

1 March 1984

