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Meeting between the Taoiseach, Dr. Garret FitzGerald, T.D.,
and the British Prime Minister, Mrs. Margaret Thatcher, M.P.,
on 18th and 19th November, 1984.

Statement by Taoiseach

I propose, a Cheann Comhairle, to make a statement on my meeting with the British Prime Minister, Mrs. Thatcher, in Chequers on 18 and 19 November. The meeting was attended on the Irish side by the Tanaiste, Deputy Dick Spring, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Deputy Peter Barry. The Prime Minister was accompanied by the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, Sir Geoffrey Howe, QC, MP, and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Mr. Douglas Hurd, MP.

Deputies have available to them in the Dail Library a copy of the agreed Communique issued after the meeting. The text of that Communique summarises our conclusions.

At the outset I should say that I and my colleagues approached this meeting with the same seriousness of purpose and sense of responsibility which as participants in the New Ireland Forum we and the members of other parties brought to our efforts to promote peace and stability against a background of terrible human suffering in Northern Ireland, before which all parties

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differences must in the common interest be set aside. It is in the same spirit, and with the same concern for national solidarity - so essential for any successful outcome - that I report to the Dáil today on this meeting.

Before going on to deal in more detail with the meeting I should, I believe, set it in context. That context is, I believe, provided by the proposals for a framework within which a New Ireland could emerge set out in paragraph 5.2 of the Forum Report. That paragraph containing as it does, the only proposals in this Report, constitutes the operational section of the Report. It describes the fundamental criterion for any new structures and processes as being their capacity to provide lasting peace and stability. Having rejected violence it goes on to recognise that the new Ireland which the Forum seeks can come about only through agreement and must have a democratic basis, and that agreement means that the political arrangements for a new and sovereign Ireland would have to be freely negotiated and agreed to by the people of the North and by the people of the South. There is no room for any ambiguity here as to the need for consent by the people of both areas to any change in sovereignty. The Provisional I.R.A. thesis which denies this concept of consent, is explicitly rejected, once and for all, by those who participated in the Forum and signed its Report.

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The Forum Report goes on to assert that new arrangements must provide structures and institutions, including security structures, with which both Nationalists and Unionists can identify on the basis of political consensus; such arrangements must overcome alienation in Northern Ireland and strengthen the stability and security for all the people of Ireland.

The programme for action set out by the unanimous will of the four main constitutional Nationalist Parties in this island in these proposals, must provide the basis for any discussions or any negotiations with the British Government or with the Parties in Northern Ireland, as we pursue the fundamental objectives for which the Forum was established - the achievement of lasting peace and stability ⁱⁿ a new Ireland.

In the preparations for this meeting with the British Prime Minister and her Cabinet colleagues, and at the meeting itself, it has been my purpose, and that of the Tanaiste and the Minister for Foreign Affairs accompanying me, to seek to establish common ground with the British Government on these objectives of the Forum.

A first step in making any progress in this direction must be an acceptance that the achievement of lasting peace and stability in Northern Ireland is not merely an Irish interest

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but is a major interest of both Ireland and Britain.

Recognition of this is set out in the Communique following this meeting.

Next, if progress is to be made, the divisions between the two communities in Northern Ireland have to be diminished and the two major traditions that exist in the two parts of Ireland have to be reconciled. This too, is specifically recognised in the Communique.

Next, it is necessary that the focus of Chapter Five of the Forum Report on the need to accept the validity of both the nationalist and unionist identities, and on the need to give them equally satisfactory, secure and durable expression and protection, should be accepted as the only basis on which lasting stability can be found. This, too, has been given clear expression in the Communique in which the British Government has joined with the Irish Government for the first time in recognising that here lies the fundamental problem that we both have to tackle in conjunction with the Constitutional representatives of the people of Northern Ireland. It may be noted that at her Press Conference the Prime Minister referred to the equal respect due to these two identities.

All of us in this House are, I believe, agreed that in the past the process of Government in Northern Ireland has not been such
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as to provide the people of both communities with the confidence that their rights will be safeguarded; the minority community, in particular, has had bitter experiences in this respect. There can be no progress unless the process of Government in Northern Ireland is such as to provide the people of both Communities with the confidence that their rights will be safeguarded. Again this conviction shared by us all finds clear and unambiguous expression in this precise form in the list of points upon which the Prime Minister and myself agreed during the course of these discussions and recorded in the Communique.

Intimately connected with these issues is the question of security. There is at present no real security in Northern Ireland. The majority community are being subjected to an inhuman campaign of murder, which they cannot but see as having genocidal overtones. All of them have been put in fear of their lives; they know they are never safe from the bullet and the bomb employed indiscriminately to murder people at worship; to shoot down a Judge's daughter on her way from Mass, or to blow to pieces innocent people just because they happen to be about their business in a place and at a time when terrorists decide to mount an indiscriminate explosion.

But, what has needed to be recognised in Britain more clearly than it has hitherto been recognised is the fact that for the
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minority too, there is no such thing as security in Northern Ireland. Many members of the minority live in areas which are not the subject of normal policing, because the police force as at present constituted does not have the confidence of a substantial part of the population. People living in these areas have no protection against the violence and intimidation of the subversive organisations operating their protection rackets and threatening with mutilation or death anyone who ~~does~~ not go along with their campaign of murder directed against the majority community. At the same time, because the efforts of the security forces have been concentrated against the I.R.A. and the I.N.L.A., more especially in recent years when these organisations have, overwhelmingly, been the source of violence in the community, the people of these areas are subjected to a degree of harassment by the security forces, which, especially in the case of the younger generation, has been eroding their confidence in any form of public order and their belief that their human rights will be safeguarded by the rule of law.

No community can survive if the system of security and indeed, the judicial process itself, lacks the confidence of a substantial part of the population.

These things must be changed if peace and stability are to be secured. A system of security must be provided, deriving its authority from a political system with which those sections of

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the community can identify. It is about these grave matters, upon which peace and stability of this island, ultimately depends, that I, the Tanaiste and the Minister for Foreign Affairs have been conferring with the British Prime Minister and her Secretaries of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and for Northern Ireland.

Much remains to be done before the process thus commenced can be brought to a satisfactory conclusion, as it must be, if our two Governments are to be seen to carry out their duty to the people of Northern Ireland, the victims of a history they did not write, but the tragic consequences of which they read about day by day, day after day, or suffer in their own persons.

I am glad that in the discussions that we have had, we have made progress in securing the acceptance by the British Government of those aspects of the Forum Report to which I have already referred. I would add that I am also glad that the Prime Minister in the House of Commons this afternoon recognised the need for a stable political framework which will be acceptable to both communities. Similarly, at her Press Conference she also recognised the need for an improvement in security in Northern Ireland (defined by the Prime Minister as including the prison and judicial systems as well as policing), on a basis which in her words "must be very much better for all the citizens of Northern Ireland" than what now exists, and which involves devising "a way that is

acceptable to all the people there, and it must be acceptable if it is to be improved".

We can, I believe, build something worthwhile on these principles. There would be little hope of building anything were these principles of acceptability of the political framework and the security system to both communities not to be part of the common ground between our two Governments.

Progress now depends upon the dialogue to which both Governments have publicly committed themselves as a preliminary to a further meeting between the Prime Minister and myself early in the New Year. I can assure this House that in this dialogue we will not be found wanting in our openness to any ideas that may further the objectives of the Forum Report as I cited them at the outset of my remarks. I hope that on the British side that there will be a similar openness and that the British Government, like our Government, will place above any other consideration the objective to which the Forum Parties set themselves - the achievement of lasting peace and stability.

As will be clear from what I have said the outcome of the Summit is not to be underestimated in the extent to which common ground now exists between the British Government and ourselves on a number of underlying principles raised in the Forum Report. It is, however, necessary also to acknowledge frankly that important differences remain to be overcome between the British and ourselves and many difficult practical issues would have to be resolved before the objectives of a new political framework and new security arrangements commanding the assent of the minority as well as the majority community could be realised.

The dialogue in which we are engaged is but the latest of many efforts to find peace and stability in Ireland. The fact that the Irish Government are now involved with the British Government in a new, intense effort, based on the work of the Forum Report, is in itself an achievement. If this effort is to succeed generosity will be required on all sides. As we embark on the crucial and critical phase of the discussions, I ask for the support of all who wish Ireland well and who share our passionate desire for lasting peace and stability in the island of Ireland and for a relationship of friendship and trust between the peoples of both islands.