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NEW IRELAND FORUM

Statement by Dr. Colm O hEocha, Chairman of the New Ireland Forum, at
the closing session of the Forum, Dublin Castle, 2 May 1984

Members of the New Ireland Forum, Ladies and Gentlemen:-

This Forum has proved to be a unique and powerful mechanism to deepen our knowledge and understanding and to seek solutions to the problems facing us on the island of Ireland as we approach the end of the twentieth century.

The result of this process, involving an intensive dialogue among the four participating Parties, is a Report which should herald a new beginning for all who have been cruelly disappointed by past failures.

Following eleven months of dedicated and conscientious effort, the members of the Forum are to be congratulated on the Report which I have the honour to introduce today. Politicians are naturally conscious of the policies of their parties; in the course of this impressive process in which I have been privileged to participate, I have observed a genuine openness of approach in search of an equitable solution to one of the most difficult political problems in Europe. Go deimhin thógabhair suas bhúr súile agus heidh sliocht bhúr sleachta buíoch dhíbh dá réir - you, the members of the Forum, did indeed raise your eyes in the course of your work and future generations on this island will thank you accordingly.

The human suffering and the danger of escalating conflict which face all of us on this island and in Britain, regardless of our history and identity, are so great that extraordinary political efforts are needed to overcome them. The long and thorough analysis of the problem undertaken by each Member of the Forum, with assistance from many who contributed to its work by making submissions and oral presentations, or who advised as consultants, should ensure that its findings get careful attention. The political will to progress towards a solution, which is epitomised by the dedication shown by the four leaders of the participating constitutional parties, representing over 90 per cent of nationalist opinion and nearly three-quarters of the people on this island, deserves to be widely recognised; for political leaders with innumerable other calls on their time to meet together 97 times in the past 11 months in a genuine search for a consensus on the means to achieve peace and stability in Ireland, signifies to me a commitment to the common good for which I greatly respect them.

To An Taoiseach, Dr. Garret FitzGerald, T.D., Mr. Charles Haughey, T.D., An Tánaiste, Mr. Dick Spring T.D., and Mr. John Hume MP, MEP, and all other members of the Forum I convey my thanks for their courtesy and co-operation in my role of facilitating agreement among them. I believe the talented and dedicated members of the Secretariat served the Forum well; for my part, I should like to record publicly their invaluable and generous assistance to me.

The New Ireland Forum Report represents, of course, the views of the democratic nationalist parties, who have sought to face their responsibilities squarely. This historic accord deserves reflection and mature consideration by all of us concerned for the future of this island and its diverse cultures and traditions. I pray that the unionist people of Northern Ireland will recognise in the Report a sincere commitment to set aside the fears and divisions of the past and to establish a basic consensus about society that would allow the development of normal politics characteristic of democratic societies.

I hope that the Forum's openness and willingness to reassess positions will encourage all those involved in one way or another in the tragic problems of Northern Ireland to do likewise. It is in all our interests to make a new beginning, to explore all avenues which might lead to improvements in the quality of our lives and those of our children by bringing about abiding peace and stability in Ireland.