

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

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Statement by Dr. Colm O hEocha, Chairman of the New Ireland Forum,

Dublin Castle, 30 May, 1983.

Members of the New Ireland Forum, Ladies and Gentlemen:

The first meeting of the New Ireland Forum is called to order.

This Forum has been established in order to contribute to the achievement of lasting peace and stability in a new Ireland. It represents a major opportunity for our generation to work for the reconciliation of the divisions that have caused suffering and tragedy for too many decades and to enable all our children to live in peace and harmony.

Naturally I consider it a great honour to have been invited to be Chairman of the Forum. My role, as I understand it, is to facilitate what I hope will be an intensive exchange of views and ideas, and to be available for such consultations as you may require in order to reach consensus. I also note that it is your hope that there would be the largest input to the Forum, in particular from Northern Ireland. Above all, it is your Forum and it is your opportunity to produce a blueprint which will contribute to the achievement of peace.

The persistent crisis in Northern Ireland has defeated many efforts at resolution and it now remains the most serious and long-lasting conflict in Western Europe. Nevertheless, the vast majority of the people who live on this island are united in one unqualified belief; it is that peace and stability can follow from political agreement, freely given, and not from domination by one community over another.

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The challenge now facing us is to fashion a land where confidence and hope replace anxiety and fear. Our efforts will be keenly observed by everyone living on this island and by our friends abroad, in Britain, in the other member-States of the European Community and in the United States of America.

The Forum will help us to explore fully our own positions and proposals. And it will provide an opportunity to re-examine our own perceptions in the light of what we have to tell each other.

As an inspiration for our work, may I suggest the inscription on the crest of the University of Calgary in Alberta, Canada. The wording is in Scots Gaelic. It reads "Mo shuille togam suas", I raise up my eyes. I suggest that we, also, in the New Ireland Forum, raise our eyes to meet the major challenge that faces us.

And now I invite An Taoiseach, Dr. Garret FitzGerald, T.D., to address the New Ireland Forum.