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EMBARGO 12 noon,  
Sunday, 16 March

FRIENDS OF IRELAND ST PATRICK'S DAY STATEMENT  
MARCH 17 1986

Irish Americans and indeed all Americans have a special reason to commemorate this St Patrick's Day. After 17 years of strife and turmoil in Northern Ireland, there is real hope that a lasting and just peace may finally be achieved.

Over the past year we have witnessed substantial progress toward our long-standing hope to achieve reconciliation between the conflicting traditions of Northern Ireland and to establish democratic political structures which will accommodate both sides of the community.

As Friends of Ireland in the Congress, we endorsed the principles of the New Ireland Forum Report of 1984 for a negotiated settlement to the crisis in Northern Ireland. We commend all those whose courage and commitment to peace and reconciliation culminated in the signing of the historic Anglo-Irish Agreement last November at Hillsborough in Northern Ireland by Prime Minister Garret FitzGerald of Ireland and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher of Great Britain.

We welcome this agreement as a long overdue step toward full recognition of the rights of both traditions in Northern Ireland and as a hopeful opportunity to end the violence and political and economic instability that has cost over 2,500 lives and wreaked havoc on the region's economy in the past two decades. The agreement rejects violence as a means of achieving political ends and commits both the Irish and British governments to an ongoing process to achieve peace and stability in Northern Ireland.

The Friends of Ireland welcome the inclusion in the accord of an unprecedented role for the Irish Government in the day to day affairs of Northern Ireland. We believe that this provision offers reasonable and needed reassurance to the minority Catholic community that its legitimate rights and interests, particularly in relation to the administration of justice, will be clearly recognized and fully protected.

The United States has a long and close relationship with both Britain and Ireland and can play an important role in helping these two friends achieve peace in Northern Ireland. We welcome President Reagan's support for the accord and his proposal for U.S. financial assistance to Northern Ireland, and we urge the Congress to act favorably and expeditiously on legislation to provide such assistance.

Finally, we renew our condemnation of those in Northern Ireland -- and in the United States -- who advocate, support, or engage in violence in any form or by any means.

On this St. Patrick's Day, we again express our commitment to the great goal of Irish unity, achieved by peaceful methods, and we pledge in the coming year to continue our efforts for peace and reconciliation, and for a new Ireland free from violence, intolerance, and discrimination. The events of 1985 laid a workable foundation for peace and a durable settlement of the conflict in Northern Ireland, and we urge all sides to build on that foundation in 1986.

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