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Reference Code:	2021/96/15
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**Speech by the Taoiseach, Mr. Albert Reynolds, T.D.,
at a meeting of the Oxford Union Society,
Friday, 27 May 1994, at 8.30 p.m.**

Mr. President, I was honoured by your invitation to come and address this august debating society. Many of your predecessors have gone on to higher things - if that is possible - in politics, diplomacy and many other callings, here and elsewhere. Two of your predecessors in the 1970s, Philip and Bobby MacDonagh, are now distinguished members of the Irish diplomatic service.

While your college dining halls have hung on their walls many portraits of public men and archbishops sent out in previous centuries to govern Ireland, a task they found ultimately unrewarding, we in Ireland like to think of ourselves as a spiritual empire. As we all know, it was St Brendan that first discovered America. So it will come as no surprise to you to learn, on the impeccable authority of the famous philosopher George Berkeley, Bishop of Cloyne, that Oxford first became a seat of learning in the 9th century, when an Irish Saint and Scholar, John Scotus Eriugena, came to teach philosophy here. There is a later unfortunate, and I am sure, apocryphal legend, that his students stabbed him to death with their pencils,

because he forced them to think! You would never do that to your professors and lecturers these days. The Irish tradition at Oxford continues today, seeing that you have recently had our leading national poet Seamus Heaney as your Professor of Poetry.

My offices in Dublin, which are open to the public every Saturday, are situated in a fine neo-baroque building that used to house the College of Science. One of the statues outside is of the famous scientist Robert Boyle, born in Lismore Castle, who taught in Oxford, and funded the translation of the Bible into Irish. I gather that Boyle's Law has to do with the relative proportionality of elasticity and pressure. If I had more time, I would like to study what application this Law might have to politics!

Thirty-five years ago in 1959, one of my predecessors, the Taoiseach Mr Seán Lemass, delivered his most important speech on Northern Ireland in this chamber. There was a young student, with Cork connections, speaking on the opposite side of the motion, about the reunification of Ireland. His name was Patrick Mayhew, now Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. In the intervening years, the long stand-off has ended, and the Governments on the two sides of the Irish Sea have come much closer, in the realization that the shared legacy of history is something that we urgently need to tackle together.

Rereading Seán Lemass' speech on that occasion, I was struck at how much of his thinking has been incorporated in the Downing Street Declaration. Lemass emphasised that the only way that the Irish people wanted to resolve the problem created by partition was "by peaceful agreement". He went on to say that it would be a very useful contribution to the solution of the problem, if the British Government were to say: "We would like to see it ended by agreement amongst the Irish. There is no British interest in preventing, or desiring to discourage you from seeking agreement". He appealed for a policy of good sense and good neighbourliness, and asked the British Government to encourage

the development of North-South contact, and concerted action in practical fields.

In the Joint Downing Street Declaration of 15 December 1993, I accept, on behalf of the Irish Government, that "the democratic right of self-determination by the people of Ireland as a whole must be achieved and exercised with and subject to the agreement and consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland".

The Downing Street Declaration also contains an acknowledgement, on behalf of the British Government, that "they have no selfish strategic or economic interest in Northern Ireland", and that "their primary interest is to see peace, stability and reconciliation established by agreement among all the people who inhabit the island". The British Government agree that "it is for the people of the island alone, by agreement between the two parts respectively, to exercise their right of self-determination on the basis of consent, freely and concurrently given, North and South, to bring about a united Ireland, if that is their wish". The British Government promise to bring in necessary legislation to give effect to this or "any measure of agreement on future relationships in Ireland which the people living in Ireland may themselves freely so decide without external impediment".

Both Governments state that they "will seek, along with the Northern Ireland constitutional parties through a process of political dialogue, to create institutions and structures which, while respecting the diversity of the people of Ireland, would enable them to work together in all areas of common interest."

There are also paragraphs in the Declaration addressed by the Taoiseach to the Unionist community in a spirit of conciliation and friendship. All the advances sought by Seán Lemass on a commonsense basis, which he argued would assist a solution of the problem, are now effectively in place.

The murderous violence and Troubles of the last 25 years stem in

large part from the unresolved problems and unfulfilled compromise solutions left by the first Anglo-Irish Settlement of 1920-1, which created Northern Ireland and gave the rest of Ireland its independence. Unfortunately, it failed to provide for the Nationalist minority in Northern Ireland, who saw themselves treated as aliens in their own country, having being deprived of taking part in the newly independent State. They experienced what has been described as 'the Nationalist nightmare'.

In a deeper sense we are looking at a situation, where the two main traditions in Ireland have not succeeded at any stage in the last 400 years in achieving a durable political accommodation. The first paragraph of the Joint Declaration acknowledges that 'the absence of a lasting and satisfactory settlement of relationships between the people of both islands has contributed to continuing tragedy and suffering'. Because of that, we are convinced that a deep, wide-ranging and balanced political settlement is needed. The two Governments are at present working further on defining the possible shape and framework of such an Agreement, based on the Downing Street Declaration.

There have been many noble efforts over the past 200 years to build bridges, and to unite Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter; the Irish Volunteers of 1782, the United Irishmen, Young Ireland, the cultural revival, and the cooperative movement, represent some of the best examples. We have to realise that we face an enormous challenge, which ultimately defeated great statesmen, British and Irish, in the past. The imperative now is to build peace, starting with a complete cessation of violence, leading on to all-round negotiations, and to a political settlement.

One of the most important sentences in the Declaration states: "The Taoiseach, on behalf of the Irish Government, considers that the lessons of Irish history, and especially of Northern Ireland, show that stability and well-being will not be found under any political system which is refused allegiance or rejected on

grounds of identity by a significant minority of those governed by it". What we need is consent by both traditions to a political framework that accommodates them both, and that recognises difference and diversity, as well as an end to the coercion or the threat of coercion, to which many in both communities in Northern Ireland are or feel subjected. The Declaration is an attempt to provide a framework that will make obsolete the psychology of dispossession and the psychology of siege, which holds such a grip over both communities.

The principle of consent, which the Irish Government and people have accepted as the condition for the establishment of a united Ireland, must equally apply to any other constitutional arrangements, including the existing ones. The history of Ireland, from the Settlement of Ulster, to the penal laws, to the Act of Union, and the use of Ulster for party political advantage here in Britain up to 1914 to defeat Home Rule, have all led to a withholding of consent by a substantial portion of Northern Nationalists, who never wanted to live under a Northern Ireland or British State. In all arrangements on this island, whether a united Ireland or some new system of Government in Northern Ireland, the consent of the governed has to be central.

The great political philosopher of the 'Glorious Revolution' and close Oxford friend of Robert Boyle, John Locke, wrote disapprovingly of the conquests and confiscations of the 17th century. He taught that 'the People who are the Descendants of those who were forced to submit to the yoke of a Government by constraint' are entitled to withhold their consent 'till their Rulers put them under such a form of Government, as they willingly, and of choice consent to'.

Notwithstanding revised interpretations of history, many Irish Nationalists continue to believe with some justice that the partition of Ireland was wrong. They would further consider that Northern Ireland forfeited any claim to allegiance and acquiescence it might have acquired over time by the

discrimination exercised against Nationalists for over 50 years. Since the abolition of Stormont in 1972, Northern Ireland has been in the political limbo of direct rule, which is recognized on all sides to be an unsatisfactory situation in the long-term. The final sentence of the summary of the main provisions of the Government of Ireland Act, 1920, reads ironically today: 'It will therefore be for Irishmen themselves to decide in the near future whether they will themselves take up the reins of Government in their own country or be ruled by the Government of the United Kingdom under a system analogous to Crown Colony Government'. Over the past 20 years, numerous initiatives have been taken, so far unsuccessfully, to construct political institutions, which would command a sufficient degree of cross-community support to make them viable.

The net point I am making is this. The Irish Government and people have accepted in the Joint Declaration and in the Anglo-Irish Agreement that Irish unity can only come about by consent, and that it would be wrong to attempt to impose it by coercion. This has never been so clearly and so formally stated before. But, correspondingly, those of the Unionist tradition have to accept that, if Northern Ireland is for some time to come to remain under the jurisdiction of the United Kingdom, as a majority wish, then they too must win the consent of Northern Nationalists to the democratic arrangements and structures, under which this will happen. The days of simple majoritarianism are over. The total domination of one community by another is no longer acceptable as a basis for being governed. We see that principle clearly at work in the new South Africa as well.

As I have been saying, and as the British Government confirmed in its response to Sinn Féin, acceptance of the Joint Declaration is not a precondition for Republicans to enter the talks process. All that is required is a definite end to paramilitary violence. Republicans are not required to abandon any of their political principles. They are entitled to continue to regard partition, past or present, as wrong, and to seek to end it politically.

They do not have to submit politically to an acceptance of the State of Northern Ireland, as hitherto constituted. They only have to accept that the status quo cannot and will not be altered by force. They are positively invited to participate in all-round talks to create a new all-round political settlement, which the Irish Nationalist tradition as a whole throughout Ireland and the Ulster Unionist tradition can accept.

Unionist fears are also catered for. The Joint Declaration establishes a democratic framework for all, and provides equal opportunities to Unionists and Nationalists to promote over time their political aims and aspirations. The interplay of forces means that no one can guarantee the full realization of the aims of any particular group. There has to be compromise. In a democracy you cannot set out political objectives and timescales, as if one were planning a military campaign. But the two Governments, using the principle of democracy, can provide a level playing-field, where over time there need be no second-class citizens. The frame of reference in the Declaration is, for the first time since 1920, the people of Ireland, North and South. The only condition, which is surely reasonable, for full democratic participation by any group or organization is a commitment to abide exclusively by the democratic process.

Fundamental constitutional issues are very unlikely to be completely resolved in this generation. But the Declaration makes it clear that the British Government do not stand in the way of a united Ireland by consent, and are not an enemy to the Nationalist people. The Irish Government accept that consent is essential, both morally and legally and as a practical necessity. We are not an enemy to the Unionist people, and do not have any wish to coerce the Unionist community. Any such idea would be repugnant to the overwhelming majority of the people of the State which I represent.

The balanced constitutional accommodation outlined in the Declaration will need, in the context of an overall settlement,

to be reflected in constitutional legislation on both sides of the Irish Sea. On that basis, I have accepted that the Irish Government will put forward and support proposals for change in the Irish Constitution, which would fully reflect the principle of consent in Northern Ireland. In fact, our Supreme Court has already decided in 1990 that Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution are fully compatible with our obligation in international law, under the Anglo-Irish Agreement, to accept the principle of consent.

But if the exercise of State sovereignty is to be contingent on consent, that holds equally true for both Britain and Ireland. To use the language of the British response to Sinn Féin, a reflection of this understanding would, in my opinion, have implications for key aspects of the Government of Ireland Act, 1920, as well as for the Irish Constitution.

I have repeatedly argued that the shape of a possible interim accommodation is in fact contained in other provisions of the Government of Ireland Act, which were stillborn and never implemented.

The Government of Ireland Act, 1920, formalised partition, and its Council of Ireland provisions were carried over into the Treaty. While Northern Nationalists inevitably have a negative view of it, it contained, on paper at least, important elements of compromise. If they had been implemented in the spirit intended by the legislators, the future might have been very different. Paradoxically, in the minds of the British Government at the time, partition took place within the context of "the essential unity of Ireland".

In the summary or explanatory memorandum of the legislation, the British Government stated in 1920 that "the Act contemplates and affords every possibility for union between North and South". Indeed, it provided for the eventual establishment of a single Parliament, admittedly still under overall British jurisdiction.

There is a parallel in the Declaration, which says the role of the British Government will be "to encourage, facilitate and enable" the achievement of agreement over a period between all the people who inhabit the island of Ireland.

It was a fundamental part of the original 1920-1921 compromise that the creation of a separate Northern Parliament and the continuing constitutional links between the North and Britain would be paralleled by strong North-South links, in effect, the Council of Ireland, and various sectoral bodies. While in the 1920s there was an effort to retain as much uniform administration as possible, today in the 1990s, the European Union and the virtual disappearance of economic borders make harmonisation and cooperation in many economic matters both sensible and desirable. North-South institutions have potential attractions for all; practical advantages for the Northern business community, and an expression of shared identity for all those in either community, who value to any degree a shared sense of Irishness with the people of the South.

There is in my view immense potential for such cooperation. Only this week, we reopened the Ballinamore-Ballyconnell canal after 120 years, linking the Erne and Shannon waterways over a 300 mile stretch, opening up beautiful but unfamiliar countryside through Leitrim, Cavan and Fermanagh to visitors from home and abroad. It is a flagship project funded by the two Governments, the EU, and the International Fund for Ireland. The CBI in Northern Ireland and the employers' organisation in the South IBEC in a recent study identified potential in increased North-South trade, which will create up to 75,000 new jobs. Now that customs barriers have gone, it is to the benefit of both North and South to create a vibrant Single Market on the island of Ireland.

The final key principle in the Government of Ireland Act, 1920, was the outlawing of discrimination on grounds of religion, a duty more honoured in the breach than in the observance. Today,

full implementation of the principles of equality of treatment and parity of esteem are vital to any lasting accommodation. Examples would include equal employment opportunities; the fostering of cultural identity in all its diversity, including the recognition of the value of the Irish language as an important heritage of the two traditions, support for parents who want their children taught through the medium of Irish, and bilingual street names where desired; full access to and reception of the Irish broadcasting service as well as the British services throughout the North; and a more sensitive use of official symbols.

No one should underestimate the great thirst for justice that exists in the North. Many see themselves striving not only for peace by itself but for peace with justice. Duns Scotus Eriugena, to whom I referred earlier, left a beautiful and evocative description from the 9th century of this state of mind:

'For here in this life darkened by mists, there is, I believe, nothing yet perfect in human striving, nothing that would be free of all error; similar to the just, still living, who cannot be called just, because they are just, but because they wish to be just, and strive for perfect justice in the future, and are so called solely because of the yearning of their temperament'.

That intense idealism, born out of dark and difficult conditions, is a force to be reckoned with in any search for a solution.

The great merit of the Joint Declaration is that it removes any last vestige of justification for violence from both Republican and Loyalist paramilitaries. There have been over 3,000 deaths in Northern Ireland in the past 25 years. Every one of them has been tragic, whether the victims are the civilians caught in bomb blasts or singled out at random for assassination, members of the police or army carrying out their duties, or even members of paramilitary organizations on both sides who have died for a

cause in which they believed or in which they became caught up. Each of them have left grieving families and friends. People also died needlessly in gun and bomb attacks in England and the Republic and further afield. Many more have been maimed for life. No political cause has been served by campaigns that have been both deadly and futile since the day they began.

Paradoxically, both the cause of Irish unity and the continued union of Northern Ireland with Britain have been undermined by the violence and extremism, which includes an ugly sectarianism. Many in the two communities in Northern Ireland are bedevilled by a zero-sum mentality, that judges the appropriate response to any situation to be in inverse proportion to the response of the other side. Far from it being the case that, if one side gains, the other side must lose, the reality is that both communities have been losing out heavily from continued violence, and both can gain enormously from peace.

For Republicans, the principle of Irish self-determination has been explicitly recognized for the first time. The British are committed to being persuaders for an agreement between the people of Ireland, and have promised to place no impediment in its way. I have stated, and the British Government have recently confirmed, that no group or organization has a veto on policy, for example, by staying away from the negotiating table.

The electoral mandate of Sinn Féin has been clearly and unambiguously recognized in the British Government's recent response. Sinn Féin themselves claim to accept that the Unionist and Protestant people of the North cannot be coerced into a united Ireland. If they sincerely mean that, there can be no logical justification for their continued campaign of violence. Pushing the British out, even if it could be achieved, would not force Unionists into joining with the rest of Ireland. In any case, under the Declaration, a united Ireland cannot come into being without the concurrent consent of the people of the Republic. The people of the Republic have made it clear through

the unanimous support for the Declaration of their Parliament that they will not agree to a forced unity with the North. We utterly repudiate armed struggle as a means of solving the problems between the two communities in Northern Ireland and the two traditions in Ireland as a whole.

The balance between self-determination and consent has been inherent to the Irish peace initiative from its inception, and must be the foundation of any consensus in the proposed Forum. If violence continues, because of a belief that in the last resort the wishes of a majority in Northern Ireland can be overridden, then Sinn Féin's quarrel will be not only with the British Government but with the rest of the Irish people. They must clearly understand that the position of the Irish Government on this is not going to change, either now or in the future.

Throughout the peace process, I have been very conscious of the existence of Loyalist paramilitary organisations, whose origins go back a long way and who over the past 2½ years have inflicted more deaths than Republicans. Some rights to which they claim to be attached from their own public policy statements were in fact incorporated in their own words in paragraph 5 of the Declaration.

The stated justification for their campaign is also removed by the Joint Declaration, and that should be unambiguously stated by their political and community leaders. The Declaration clearly and unequivocally states that neither the Irish Government nor the people of the Republic will seek to coerce them into a United Ireland against the will of a majority in Northern Ireland, and we mean that. The Unionist perception of a community under political siege is not justified after publication of the Declaration. I would like to see Unionist leaders selling that message. I expect them to say to Loyalists, just as bluntly and forthrightly as I and John Hume have said to Republicans, that there is no valid excuse or justification for continued violence of any kind. There should be no excuses, no

extenuations, no condemnations that appear to condone or understand. In that context, I do welcome Mr Molyneaux's statement of Friday last, in which he called for an immediate cessation to the campaign of terror being waged by loyalist paramilitaries.

There are voices that try to hold the Declaration in some way responsible for recent increased violence, people who condemned it, even before the ink was dry. It has been obvious for a long time that some in the North, who thrive on division, are not interested in peace and do not want it, and will roundly condemn any political effort to bring it about. There are also those engaged deeply in racketeering and other profitable criminal activity, who have a vested interest in violence continuing. Once again - I pose the question - who is afraid of peace and why?

We recognize that the only agreement which will last is one that the Unionist and Loyalist community have freely participated in making. How the electoral weight of that community is represented at the Conference table is a matter for the Unionist parties themselves to decide, once violence is over. That does not mean, however, that those who have the necessary democratic support to preserve the Union can do so entirely on their own terms. They have a positive obligation to join in searching for a new political settlement, which will accommodate Northern Nationalists, in a way that the old Stormont failed to do. This would include a joint sharing of responsibility in Government; institutional structures bringing North and South closer together, and evolving over time both for practical reasons and in recognition of the Irish identity; and equality of treatment and parity of esteem on a reasonable basis between the two communities.

I ask nothing of Unionists in Northern Ireland, that I would not ask of Nationalists in the event of Irish unity. If some form of cross-community power-sharing is necessary in Northern

Ireland, it would also be necessary in a united Ireland. If a new Northern Ireland settlement must include a strong Irish dimension, then a united Ireland might well need to have stronger institutional links with Britain, without prejudice to sovereignty, as discussed at the time of the Joint Studies in 1980-1. Dual citizenship for the people of the North, which is effectively available in practice now, should also be a right in any future situation.

If we are demanding that features of Northern Ireland, which are obnoxious to Nationalists, should be removed or softened, then we in the Republic must also accept that our laws and institutions should be fully pluralist as well. We cannot seek one approach for the North, and another for the South. We want minorities of various kinds to play a full role in our society, which they have mostly done since the State was founded. But we will shortly be bringing in far-reaching equality legislation, which will absolutely prohibit discrimination on grounds of religion, gender, race or disability, underpinning Constitutional provisions against religious discrimination.

There has been much reform in recent years, and some of our newer social legislation is in advance of such legislation in the North or in Britain. A further divorce referendum is likely to be held in the next 12 months, with present opinion poll indications being that it would be passed. Northern Ireland, which would be very similar culturally to the South, has fairly tight legislation, and has not experienced the rapid escalation in the divorce rate that has occurred in other places.

The first priority, following a cessation of violence, must be to try and restore better relations between the two communities in Northern Ireland and the two traditions in Ireland, and to build up a new trust and spirit of reconciliation. I fully realise that is not a short-term task, but one that will take a long time and a lot of patient effort to achieve. That priority would be one of the main purposes of the Forum for Peace and

Reconciliation, which I propose to establish within our jurisdiction, in consultation with other democratic parties, to which Northern democratic parties will be invited. The Alliance Party has indicated interest in participating as well as the SDLP and Sinn Féin.

Since the British Prime Minister John Major and myself first met in early 1992 and decided to try and do something to break the stalemate in Northern Ireland, the path to peace has been slow and tortuous. I was convinced that a framework of principles set out in a joint declaration by the two Governments could achieve a breakthrough to peace, and enhance the atmosphere for constructive all-round negotiations in a atmosphere free of violence. Following intensive and arduous discussions last autumn, agreement was reached between John Major and myself in the form of the Downing Street Declaration. Recently, he has authorised a helpful response to a number of points raised over recent months by Sinn Féin, enabling the logjam over clarification to be removed, and clearing the way for a definitive response.

I would like to take the opportunity to pay tribute to John Major for his courage and leadership and his willingness to take political risks, in adopting the approach of putting peace top of the agenda. Many famous English rulers and British statesmen have not enjoyed, because of their Irish policy, the same high regard in Ireland as in Great Britain. John Major, will always deserve the respect and gratitude of the Irish people for his part in the Joint Declaration. I would also like to acknowledge the very positive role played by Sir Patrick Mayhew and his office in recent months in promoting the Declaration. It will be the new starting point for the resumed talks process, which will seek an agreed settlement involving the pure relationships at the heart of thought.

Continued violence is the biggest obstacle to progress in Ireland, both political and economic. It costs Ireland

proportionately about three times what it costs Britain, though I do not want to minimize the immense cost here either. The importance of peace now is well understood by most of Ireland's friends in the United States, especially those who helped to get a visa for Gerry Adams as their contribution to the peace process. Many of them are very disappointed at the slow pace of progress since, and share our conviction that peace now is essential, if they are to give effective support to Ireland. Any remaining support for the armed conflict in the United States is fast disappearing, because of the strong support of President Clinton and Irish-Americans for the peace process.

Any sane observer must accept that continued violence will make a united Ireland recede ever further into the distance, and is therefore utterly counterproductive. There are clearly hardened militarists, who regard the Declaration, the recent response to the request for clarification, and all the efforts of the two Governments, with total contempt. As they are impervious to moral outrage, they must be continuously challenged to explain the failure of armed struggle over 25 years to advance by one whit the cause of a united Ireland, and to face the reality that it has manifestly deepened divisions and made political progress more difficult. The demonstrable futility of continuing armed struggle, in defiance of the overwhelming will of the Irish people, will as surely undermine any attempt by them to continue over a long period, just as the loss of belief in Apartheid or in Communism led to the sudden internal collapse of those systems. The twin-track strategy of the armalite and the ballot box has come to the parting of the ways. Any attempt to maintain it much longer will totally discredit the entire so-called peace strategy, which Sinn Féin has slowly and painfully built up over recent times.

I have domestic critics, who have been pressing me for some time now to pronounce the whole peace process dead and a waste of time, and indeed who are trying to make the honourable efforts of John Major and myself somehow responsible for recent violence.

I have no intention of letting the paramilitary diehards off the hook so easily. As head of a sovereign Irish Government, I am not a passive crystal ballgazer, waiting and wondering, more in hope than in confidence, whether the paramilitaries are going to oblige us all by making the right and sensible decision. I am determined, with the help of public opinion and an overwhelming democratic mandate for peace at my back, to insist that the paramilitaries stop their campaigns, whether they want to or not, so far as it lies within the power of the Government that I lead. I know that John Major and the British Government share my determination.

After a cessation of violence, a period to allow peace and reconciliation to take hold is essential, whatever the future may hold. I am convinced there would be a large peace dividend for both parts of Ireland, through increased trade, investment and tourism, and through greatly enhanced North-South and cross-border economic cooperation. The Republic has had over the past few years the most dynamically growing economy in Europe. In just nine years, our average GDP per capita has risen from 62% of the EU average in 1985 to 80% in 1994. Northern Ireland's was 74% in 1991. The economic gap between North and South is closing rapidly and will soon be gone.

Demographic change is also taking place, which will make the two communities of virtually equal size within a generation. It underlines even more the necessity for accommodation and compromise on both sides.

Ireland as a whole and Britain would enjoy even greater respect abroad, if we both could be seen to be solving a problem, widely perceived in the past to have been less difficult, less hopeless, and less intractable than apartheid in South Africa, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Berlin wall and the division of Germany, or the deceptive permafrost of the Cold War and the Communist bloc. Together, we must make a concerted effort to break down the integrity of the quarrel that has survived so many

cataclysms this century. The people of Northern Ireland deserve a helping hand to lift them out of the appalling situation, which is a legacy of tragic historical miscalculations on many sides. The two Governments are in the best position to do that.

The path to peace is open. It will take courage and wisdom on all sides to take it. The objective conditions and the opportunities are right. But the opportunity will not in reality wait forever. It will eventually be overtaken or overwhelmed by events, over which no one group or Government may have control.

I look forward to an early, positive and definitive Republican response, to be preceded or followed by a cessation of loyalist violence. In the meantime, both Governments will be getting on with the work necessary to restart talks. The preparation of a Framework Agreement grounded in the Downing Street Declaration is continuing apace, and the two Governments are not sitting back waiting for a response from the paramilitaries. Close security cooperation against terrorism from all sides continues.

What is available to all, notwithstanding the recent past, is an honourable end to violence, an all-round demilitarisation of the situation, and full participation by both communities on equal terms in talks leading to what we hope will be the first truly comprehensive political settlement in Ireland.

There are three principles which I hold to be vital to a solution.

The first is that the status quo cannot be maintained. We cannot accept a situation where people are so deeply divided in their allegiance and hopes. We cannot accept a scene where murder is regarded as the most plausible form of political argument open to either side in the dispute.

If the status quo cannot be maintained then, by definition,

change must come. That is the second of my basic principles. I do not mean that is a threat to the allegiance or identity of either side, because that would mean a continuation or a worsening of the violence. Change can come about only by consent, as there can be no stable government without the consent of the governed.

Every Government in Ireland since at least as far back as Sunningdale in 1973, and indeed back to Lemass, has accepted the principle of consent as it applies to Northern Ireland. There can surely be no doubt as to the force and continuity of the recognition by the two Governments of "consent" as a fundamental of any change in relation to Northern Ireland.

The third principle is that change, if it is to succeed in bringing the sides together, must recognise the legitimacy of each. It must be based on guarantees which each side accepts and is willing to work, and it must be imaginative, bringing to the scene something new.

Peace is the simple acceptance of the right of men and women to go about their lives, without fear of being annihilated by some random bomb or bullet. It cannot be beyond our imagination and our ingenuity to devise a solution or a framework with the people of Northern Ireland, which will bring that peace, and give firm recognition to the unity of spirit on this, which now exists between London and Dublin, with considerable support from both Washington and Brussels.

Let us also forge a new spirit of friendship and partnership between our own two countries. Edmund Burke, who was deeply attached to both, once wrote:

"England and Ireland may flourish together. The world is large enough for us both. Let it be our care not to make ourselves too little for it".