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**Speech by the Taoiseach, Mr. Albert Reynolds, T.D.  
at the Conferral of an Honorary Doctorate  
St. Joseph's University, Philadelphia  
Thursday, 6 October 1994 at 3:30pm.**

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May I first express appreciation for the great honour of being conferred with an Honorary Doctorate in Public Service by St. Joseph's University. This is an honour I shall cherish and value with special pride.

St. Joseph's is rightly proud of its standard of excellence and the achievements of its students, past and present. The ties between this University and Ireland have always been close and strong. We are proud of this relationship, and we look forward to strengthening and building on it in the years ahead.

It was in this city of Philadelphia that the American experiment in democracy first began, when in 1787 a Convention met to draft a Constitution for the United States, that has triumphantly stood the test of time. Benjamin Franklin described their work as 'groping as it were in the dark to find political truth'. But in the end it was here that a light was lit that still glows around the world. The validity of the democratic model, while still not universally accepted, has made immense strides, and it no longer has any serious challengers.

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On his journey to Washington in February 1861 to assume the Presidency, Abraham Lincoln visited Philadelphia and dedicated his Administration to cherish and preserve the belief that true freedom comes from honouring and cherishing diversity within a framework of law.

Lincoln spoke eloquently on that occasion of "this special place where were collected together the wisdom, the patriotism, the devotion to principle from which sprang the institutions under which we live". Of the Founders of the Republic who met here, he said simply and rightly that "liberty", as a hope to all the world, for all future time, was the sentiment guiding them".

That guiding concept has remained the basis for America's engagement with itself and with the world in all the years that have since passed.

I am, therefore, privileged to be here today in this city that has given so much to America and in this University that continues to bear honourable and proud testament to the American ethos of embracing diversity and welcoming change.

In his second Inaugural, President Lincoln spoke with quiet force of the need to "bind up the nation's wounds". That is also the goal facing Irish people today, as we set about finally transcending dark forces in our history, and meeting the challenge of building a lasting peace in our island.

I have spoken of the American tradition of freedom and diversity and of putting to one side dissensions while also seeking to draw strength from differences. In the founding of America, Irish men and women of both traditions felt able to join together in pursuit of a dream bigger than any of their differences. Distinguished Irish leaders in Philadelphia like John Barry, "Father of the American Navy" Charles Thompson, and John Armstrong left a shining legacy of resolutely working together for the sake of a shared and common objective.

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I believe most people in Ireland agree that there is now every reason for confidence that a tragic chapter in our history has come to an end. We have, however, learned too much over the years to expect any instant miracles or to believe that our ultimate success in consolidating peace can be lightly achieved.

Historic fears on all sides still persist, and while such fears may seem exaggerated or unfounded to outsiders, we must accept that they remain dangerously fertile and real. Violence has maimed Ireland terribly because of these fears. They can be put to rest only by our own best efforts and through reasoned negotiation and peaceful reconciliation of differences.

The peace process in Ireland needs the committed support of everyone in Ireland and of our friends and partners in America, Canada, Europe, and further afield, in Australia and New Zealand. Even with goodwill on all sides, the consolidation of a lasting peace will be a difficult undertaking. It is not within the power of any one party or organisation to guarantee permanent peace. It is the duty and responsibility of both Governments and all the parties working together to build, to nurture and to guarantee the peace.

The task of reconciling differences and aspirations between both traditions in Ireland will be difficult and daunting. In Northern Ireland, there remains not only an absence of consensus on fundamental constitutional principles but also a deep divide on the very source of legitimate political authority.

I strongly believe also, however, that in the absence of violence we now have a far greater possibility of success in reaching agreement on ways in which we can live together in whole-hearted trust and understanding. It was for that reason that over the past two and a half years I have striven so hard with others to reach the stage, where talks and negotiations could take place in a peaceful atmosphere without the threat of violence.

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For twenty-five years, the people of Northern Ireland have shown unstinting courage and strength in adversity. They did so in the face of appalling trials that tested them to the limit. Great tribute is owed to all those in the community and in political life, who have striven hard for peace and who have never wavered in their commitment to democracy, the rule of law, and their opposition to violence. John Hume, in particular, and his constitutional nationalist party in the North, the SDLP, deserve perhaps the greatest credit in this regard, as they have frequently exposed themselves by their courageous political stand to physical danger from both extremes.

If we are now well on the way to removing the evil of violence, we should remember that it is the people of Northern Ireland who have endured most of this violence and who gain most from its end, even if some are reluctant to acknowledge this.

It is all too sadly true that the conflict in Northern Ireland has damaged almost every aspect of life and endeavour in Ireland for the past twenty-five years. A whole generation has grown up in its shadow and suffered greatly from its evil effects.

In difficult days over the past year, I have drawn encouragement from the conviction that there is no higher duty for an Irish Government than the achievement of peace in Ireland. The search for lasting peace - and for new structures to consolidate peace - is not just a desirable political goal, but a moral imperative demanding on all our parts qualities of imagination and energy in matching the responsibility we face.

While abhorring the violence that I also believe was futile from the beginning, I nevertheless want to acknowledge the courage of Gerry Adams and the leadership of Sinn Fein and the IRA, in recognizing that the only way forward now was, in their own words, through 'a definitive commitment to the success of the democratic peace process'. They have said that the ceasefire holds in all circumstances, and I believe them.

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There are many sceptics at home and elsewhere who I am sure would like to see me proved wrong. The discipline of the Republicans has held now for over five weeks, without any breach of the ceasefire, a situation that would not be easily paralleled anywhere else. One has only to think of Bosnia for an example of the precise opposite. Sinn Fein know that the democratic path will not be easy for them. Indeed, it is not easy for anyone. But they have made what I am certain is a long-term strategic decision, on which there is no going back. There are many difficulties to be patiently resolved, the safe disposal of arsenals from all sides in due course, the phased release of prisoners, the establishment of an acceptable system of policing that removes any excuse for vigilantism, and the early withdrawal to barracks of British Forces. Everyone must rise to the challenge.

To resolve the conflict in Northern Ireland would confer an inestimable benefit on all the people of the two islands. It would lift an intolerable and tragic burden from the people of Northern Ireland. It would enable both parts of Ireland to adapt to the formidable new economic and social challenges we face free of the futile distraction and waste of this conflict.

The Joint Declaration agreed between the British Prime Minister John Major and myself last December was an historic and decisive development, in that it provided for the first time a political framework which removed permanently any justification for violence from any quarter. It charted an honourable alternative to those engaged in violence, and offered a democratic path that could be taken in pursuit of their political objectives.

The cessation of violence represents the beginning, rather than the end, of a process. It must now be matched at the earliest possible moment by a similar action by Loyalist paramilitaries. While some people claim to be preoccupied by the issue of the permanence or otherwise of the IRA ceasefire, they tend to overlook the fact that there is not any sort of ceasefire as yet from the Loyalist side.

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Further violent actions by Loyalists are vehemently rejected by the overwhelming majority in their own community. The deaths of innocent people, because of opposing political beliefs or their religion, bring no glory to any cause, and serve no possible rational objective.

I know that many in the Unionist community view the prospect of peace with uncertainty. Twenty-five years of violence have taken a heavy toll. Violence has diminished trust and widened the gap between the Unionist and Nationalist communities in Northern Ireland as well as between North and South. We now have to build that trust, but we can only do so, if we start from the premise of our mutual interdependence and accept that each side holds an indispensable part of the solution in negotiating a shared and agreed future.

The twin principles of self-determination balanced by consent must and will remain the essential bedrock in any new arrangements or structures on our island, both in a Northern Ireland context, and in an all-Ireland framework or a combination of the two. In a national territory, which has been partitioned for over 70 years, self-determination can only be exercised concurrently.

The only basis for a new approach must be consent, democracy and mutual respect. There is now a unique opportunity to define the rights and assuage the fears of both communities in Northern Ireland on the bedrock foundation of the consent and self-determination of the Irish people. I believe that the Unionist community will find in the firm rejection of any notion of coercion against them, physical or otherwise, as profound and psychologically meaningful an assurance of their rights as any other commitment or guarantee that can be offered to them.

The paramount challenge we face is to translate respect for both traditions from the level of abstract principle into actual political structures with which both traditions can identify.

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We have to set as our tasks the resolution of our differences, rather than the defence of our traditional inherited positions. That involves each tradition accepting the reality of the other. None of the arrangements tried so far has worked satisfactorily in the sense of bringing lasting peace to Northern Ireland, to the island of Ireland and to both islands. A new and more imaginative approach is called for.

Our prospects for success will be measured by the degree we - the people of the island, North and South - accept the reality that there are two major identities, two traditions, two communities, and that the tragedy of Northern Ireland will not end, until political arrangements are decided which will ensure equality of treatment between both. I accept of course that there is also some middle ground, which does not define itself in those terms.

We have to devise arrangements which will ensure true equality of treatment, both at the level of individual rights, and in terms of honouring the definitions of allegiance and identity passionately felt by both traditions. A true partnership between the two main communities in the North, allied to a new partnership between North and South, will help to achieve a lasting settlement capable of transforming relations on our island and between Ireland and Britain.

If we are to succeed in the task, political leaders on the island, from both traditions, must have the courage to break free from past imprisoning perspectives and transcend the politics and tactics of the moment. We have to examine together and in an open spirit how we can move in a new direction in the interests of all Irish people.

It is transparently not possible to hope for agreement through taking exclusive account of the concerns of one or other side. The Nationalist tradition are ready to spell out in every way possible their acceptance that any future arrangements must fully honour and safeguard the rights of the Unionist community, and that no lasting settlement is possible that does not have their allegiance.

It is equally true, however, that Nationalists in Northern Ireland must, for the first time, be given a political framework which they can truly identify with.

The principle of consent in all its aspects must be detached from the majoritarian attitude of winner takes all, which rightly the founding Fathers of the American Republic were so concerned to guard against. Future US President, James Madison, in the Federalist wrote in 1788 of the great importance of guarding 'one part of the society against the injustice of the other party', and that 'if a majority be united by a common interest, the rights of the minority will be insecure'. Indeed, he argued that 'in a society under the forms of which the stronger faction can readily unite and oppress the weaker, anarchy may as truly be said to reign as in a state of nature, where the weaker individual is not secured against the stronger'. This exact situation arose in Northern Ireland during the 50 years of Stormont rule, and must be guarded against in the future. If Unionists rightly demand that their consent must be obtained for any new arrangement, so also must the assent of the Nationalist community in Northern Ireland be obtained for structures governing them.

In the coming weeks, the Irish Government will be establishing a Forum for Peace and Reconciliation that will enable democratic parties on the island to discuss together and make recommendations on ways in which agreement and trust between both traditions can be established and promoted. Even if some parties on the Unionist side do conclude that they will be unable to actively participate as full members, I hope that they will take a positive and reasonable stance towards the work of the Forum and judge it fairly on its deliberations and outcome. The Forum will not be a decision-making body or a negotiating body, but its work can play a valuable part in fostering a positive climate in which negotiations can take place.

At the same time, the Irish and British Governments are continuing our work on a Joint Framework Document, which will set out our views on the shape of a fair and balanced framework and which we hope will win consent on all sides as an honourable accommodation.

The length of time that negotiations may take is not as important as that all parties should be committed, like the two Governments, to finding a new political settlement, that will represent for the first time an agreed Ireland, and provided that no one is killed in the meantime.

A distinguished Irish leader, Charles Stewart Parnell, grandson of Admiral Stewart, the commander of 'Old Ironsides' in the war of 1812, spoke in 1886 of a "conviction that the voice of Ireland, as a whole, is at this moment clearly and constitutionally spoken". I believe we can say no less today: the demand of our people, North and South, is for political leaders to put to one side the out-dated language that conceives only of victory or defeat; to transcend inherited and flawed dogmas, and to make the joint effort necessary to build a new political framework on the island that has as its foundation respect for diversity and difference.

From the beginning, Irish people of both traditions have played an important role in the building of America. In the days of Jefferson and Jackson, they made an indispensable contribution in helping to define and strengthen the practice of American democracy. For its part, the United States has been over the years a close and warm friend of Ireland and of Irish people.

Lord Mountjoy gloomily commented in the British Parliament after the Revolutionary war that "we have lost America through the Irish". Much has changed in the world since then. Today, the support of the United States is of enormous moral and practical importance to the Irish and British Governments and to both traditions in Ireland, as we seek to chart a new path to reconciliation and partnership.

The consistent and unwavering support of President Clinton for our efforts to achieve peace in Ireland is a source of enormous encouragement to Irish people, and has played a decisive role in the peace process, and in helping to bring about a complete cessation of IRA violence.

We have in the President a true and valued friend, prepared to take his own independent view on the political risks that can be justified for peace. He has followed developments extremely closely, and has pledged the continuing assistance and active support of the United States in every way possible. Not since President Wilson proclaimed the doctrine of self-determination has an American President exercised such a positive influence on events in Ireland. Not since President Kennedy has there been an American President who has shown such personal interest in and goodwill towards Ireland.

President Clinton and his Administration as well as long standing friends of Ireland in Congress, such as Speaker Tom Foley and Senator Ted Kennedy, have done more than even they perhaps realise in helping to bring about this signal time of hope and opportunity in Ireland. We will not forget the debt that we owe to them.

In accepting this Honorary Doctorate today, I offer my pledge that the Irish Government will do all in our power to be worthy of the responsibilities we face in the period ahead in building true peace on our island and achieving a new beginning for Irish people of both traditions.

Thank you.