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Statement by the Taoiseach, Mr. John Bruton TD, in

Dail Eireann on Tuesday 13th February 1996

Inan Bashir was 29 years of age. He ran a small newsagents kiosk at South Quay in Canary Wharf. He was a well known face to hundreds of office workers who bought newspapers and snacks from him before commuting home. He lived at home with his parents in Streatham, South London. His brother described him as "a lovely man". He is dead today, killed by the IRA.

John Jefferies was 31 years of age. He was helping Mr Bashir, his friend, because Friday was his busiest day. He was a keen musician who would occasionally sing songs to amuse customers. He lived at home, the only child of a widowed father, in Bromley, Kent. Father and son were referred to by neighbours as "Big John" and "Little John". He too is dead, killed by the IRA.

Inan Bashir and John Jefferies died because of republican violence. What did these two young men ever do to Ireland, or do against Irish republicans, to deserve such a death? Who has a right to decide that Inan Bashir and John Jefferies should die for Ireland?

Barbara Osei is 23 years of age. She is still in hospital suffering from horrific injuries caused by flying glass. Over 100 other people were injured in a shower of flying glass, masonry and metal. For the remainder of their lives, many of these people will be disfigured, blinded and traumatised - will wake up at night,

thinking they are back in Canary Wharf. What did they do to Ireland, what did they do against republicanism, to deserve such permanent injuries ?

These people did not deserve to suffer. To all who know any of those killed or injured at Canary Wharf, I say the overwhelming majority of Irish people, at home and abroad, share deeply in your grief. We too are traumatised by your loss.

The tragic deaths of Inan Bashir and John Jefferies on Friday last are a terrible waste of young lives. I extend my deepest sympathies on behalf of the Irish government and the Irish people to the relatives of both men. There are many questions still to be answered about the IRA bomb on Friday. Who authorised it? When did they decide ? Who knew in advance that it was going to happen ? Who knew when it would happen? Who knew that it would happen, but was not told the exact date? Who speaks for those who knew ? What would they have to say now if they met Mr Bashir's brother, or Mr Jefferies father? Would they even have the moral courage to meet them? Would they be able to look into the eyes of the bereaved?

This is a time of shock and sadness, it is also one for restraint and reconciliation. There will be much analysis, much writing, about what has happened. It is, of course, as I have said many times, true that some could have done more to underpin the peace. It is also true that others did more than could ever have been expected. I do not propose to attempt to spread the blame.

I have made my position clear. The blame for the suffering and deaths of innocent people rests solely on the shoulders of those who agreed to, who knew about, and those who planned and planted the bomb at Canary Wharf. Let us not become so lost in a moral fog, that we cannot see this much clearly.

Democratic politics is about the resolution of conflict. Politics is an inexact science, but politics will always be needed, because there will always be a conflict to be resolved. In trying to resolve conflict, politicians always have, and always will, make mistakes. In this we are no different from the rest of humanity. But there is a deep and fundamental difference, between the normal human errors that democratic politicians might make, and the use of violence to achieve political ends.

There is no moral equivalence between killing people to achieve political ends and making mistakes in the course of non-violent politics. They are entirely different, and we must, in this House, be absolutely clear about this difference.

I believe the British Government did make a mistake in its response to the Mitchell Report. I believe the Unionist parties made a mistake in not sitting down with Sinn Fein and asking them the hard questions face to face. But I do not believe that any comparison can be drawn between political mistakes, and a response to those mistakes that took human life. Killing is never justified as part of the political process. Killing is never justified as part of a negotiation. Killing is not an acceptable passport to negotiations.

No Government can allow murder, or the threat of murder, to set the political agenda. Our State is founded on democratic principles. We do not use violence,

and we reject those who do, and those who accept political support from those who do. If we accept violence in one area of life, then we are opening the door to the acceptability of violence in other areas of life.

It is part of the role of government in a democracy to protect people from violence from every quarter.

As Leader of the Opposition, before I became Taoiseach, I made an act of faith when I said that I believed in Sinn Fein, and that I was willing to believe that the IRA had ended the killing for good. I said that in this House in September 1994. Since then I have regularly met, and trusted, Sinn Fein. Even last week I had an amicable meeting with Sinn Fein. I accepted that Sinn Fein were committed exclusively to advancing their cause by peaceful, democratic politics. I believed that they had made an irreversible commitment to peace. That act of faith has now been thrown back in my face by the IRA.

I ask Sinn Fein to tell me how we can restore that faith. Let Sinn Fein tell the Government this, publicly, because this is the public's business. It is not just the stuff of private meetings. Let Sinn Fein say what they have to say to all the Irish people, not just to me.

I still want to talk to Gerry Adams about peace. I share the frustration that he, and others, feel about the pace of political progress in Northern Ireland. But I cannot do so until Sinn Fein persuade the IRA to say, and prove by what they do, that violence has no place in the political process.

Sinn Fein has influence with the IRA. Sinn Fein and the IRA are part of the one republican movement. Sinn Fein can, from time to time, speak authoritatively for the IRA. They did indeed persuade the IRA to stop the killing seventeen months ago. I believe they can persuade them to do so again. Sinn Fein must now speak to the IRA and convey a simple unambiguous message: Killing does not serve our people.

Let me make it clear. We have not shut any door on Sinn Féin. But we will not meet them at ministerial level until the IRA campaign is called off. I welcome Deputy Bertie Ahern's support, on RTE's 6.01 news on Sunday, for that policy "of not formally meeting with Sinn Fein, going back to what had been the practice over a number of years". I also welcome the support by the Leader of the Progressive Democrats, Deputy Mary Harney.

This is no more than I would have expected from two democratic parties in Dail Eireann. This Government's policy is the same as the one followed by Mr. De Valera, by Mr. Costello, by Mr. Lemass, by Mr. Lynch, by Mr. Cosgrave, by Mr. Haughey, by Dr. FitzGerald, and by Deputy Albert Reynolds. There were no handshakes or photocalls in Government Buildings until the killing was stopped. That firm policy helped bring us the peace, and it will do so again.

Our decision puts down a moral marker on what Irish society considers to be civilised behaviour. It puts down a political marker in relation to what we expect of Sinn Fein. And, and let me stress this, it also represents a security marker. I am speaking here about the security of the state, the security of all who live in our towns and countryside.

As the SDLP Deputy Leader Seamus Mallon said on RTE television last night, and I quote: "our party, the SDLP, recognises that any sovereign Government, in a sovereign State, has a duty to protect that sovereign State, and I have no hesitation whatsoever in saying, that I believe, in this instance, that the Irish Government had no option whatsoever but to take this stance".

He continued: "you cannot have a situation where a sovereign Government one day, or one hour, is sitting having discussions and negotiations with a political party that is part of a movement which is murdering people and one hour later having to go themselves either in front of the television cameras or on the steps of Government Buildings, to explain that".

Mr Mallon underscored the particular responsibility on Government, as Government, to protect the democratic institutions of the State from complicity, or the suspicion of complicity, in acts of terror.

The Government's door is open to Sinn Fein. I will talk to Gerry Adams and his colleagues as soon as they go to the IRA and succeed in getting them to say that they will stop killing people. In the meantime, Government officials are in daily contact with Sinn Fein and reporting to me on what Sinn Fein has to say.

The Tanaiste and I are willing to authorise a face to face meeting at official level with Sinn Féin. This meeting can take place on the basis that Sinn Féin would bring forward their ideas on how the ceasefire can be restored.

We appreciate the fact that there are people in the Republican movement who believe in peaceful politics and who are using their influence to get the IRA to stop killing. The Government is supporting John Hume in his enormous efforts to persuade the IRA to end violence.

If the IRA clearly state that the cessation of violence is restored, the Government will resume full political discussion with Sinn Fein.

I urge the leadership of Sinn Fein to think strategically as well as tactically. All democratic politicians have experienced tactical setbacks. I believe, and have said, that recent British Government responses were tactical setbacks for the Irish Government. But such setbacks have not, and will not, deter us from our strategic goal of agreement between the people on this island.

The republican movement must understand that a peace process cannot be just a tactic, something to turn on, and off to relieve the frustrations that will arise as part of any political process. The republican movement must come to understand that all democratic politics, anywhere, are based on the principle of consent - consent not to use violence, consent to accept the same rules as apply to others, consent to abide by collective decisions.

The republican movement as a whole must reflect on the principle it signed up to, when it joined the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation, namely "that all differences relating to the right of self determination of the people of Ireland, and to all other matters, will be resolved exclusively by peaceful and democratic means".

Sinn Fein need to really think about what that means for their current attitude to the IRA bomb in London.

Sinn Fein did not make a mistake when it embraced the peace process. The peace process was working. Let me itemise the progress that has been made so far, which shows why the republican movement should have persevered with the peace process.

- The British Government have accepted that they no longer have any selfish or strategic interest in Ireland, and that they will accept the will of the people of Northern Ireland on their political future. It is now for the people to find a basis for agreement, with the support and involvement of both Irish and British Governments.
- As a result of the cessation of violence, British and Irish Ministers were freely meeting with Sinn Fein.
- Highly accomplished reports on many issues of relevance to the Northern Ireland situation were compiled by the parties at the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation.
- We were closer than we had ever been to the goal of all party talks. The British and Irish Governments had agreed a firm aim of launching all party negotiations by the end of this very month.
- There was, as Prime Minister Major's speech showed yesterday, a lot of work is going on, on alternative mechanisms for launching these negotiations, on a

basis that would allow everybody to take part - including Sinn Fein and the Unionists.

- The Mitchell Report had just been published and provided a carefully balanced formula for getting over the roadblock in regard to decommissioning

More than that, last week had been characterised by a considerable intensification of the political track.

The Government's proposal for proximity talks was gaining real momentum towards all-party negotiations by the end of this month.

The Tánaiste's visit to the United States, and in particular his discussions with President Clinton, went very well.

His meeting with the Progressive Unionist Party in the political track was a milestone.

The Government's face-to-face discussions with the SDLP, the Alliance Party and Sinn Féin were most constructive.

And on the morning of Friday - the day of the bombing - I had a very positive meeting with four key Conservative Party backbench MP's who were I believe, beginning to appreciate the merit and practicality of the Irish Government's proposal.

As such progress was being made, the IRA decided to ignite a bomb in London. Apart from its immorality, this bomb was a drastic political mistake from the point of view of the cause of Ireland.

Let me tell the House what we have been working on, and continue to work on, with the British Government.

We are working on an inclusive, democratic mechanism that will be ready and waiting for Sinn Fein and the Republican movement as soon as the IRA renounce violence. We want to build a vehicle that will accommodate the two Governments, the Unionists and the Nationalist communities in all party negotiations. We want Sinn Fein to be part of that. They have much to contribute. But before they join us in rebuilding the peace process, they must get the IRA to stop killing for political purposes. The Government sincerely hope that Sinn Féin will influence the IRA to reach that decision. That is why we are leaving open channels of communication to that end at official level.

For our part, the Government will do everything possible to get the peace process back on track. In particular, we will work closely with the British Government to steer the process through this difficult stage. I had a very constructive telephone conversation with the British Prime Minister on Sunday evening. We agreed on two key objectives:-

- First, to bring an immediate end to violence and secure a restoration of the IRA ceasefire;

- Second, to persevere with our work towards the commencement of all-party negotiations.

With a view to advancing those objectives, the Prime Minister and I agreed to meet as planned later this month. There is much for both Governments to build on. Progress at times since the end of August 1994 may have been slow, but set against the history of three centuries of fundamental political division in the ancient province of Ulster, the pace and nature of work in the last two years towards a lasting, all-inclusive settlement, was quite unprecedented.

Imaginative intergovernmental understandings were reached. The Joint Framework Document set out for the first time a shared British/Irish model of a possible agreement that was designed to give impetus, focus and direction to all-party negotiations.

The US Administration led by President Clinton was - and still is - an active participant in the peace process.

The Mitchell Report on decommissioning offered new and challenging insights on the way forward to immediate political negotiations.

The work of the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation was providing clear focus on realities, principles and requirements.

And most recently, of course, we launched our proposal for proximity talks as a mechanism in achieving the firm aim of all-party negotiations set out in the November Communiqué.

All these developments were against a general background of peace dividends for everyone -reduced security, economic rejuvenation and above all, the freedom from the oppressive fear of bombs and bullets. Those dividends, and the potential for their further development, will guide the actions of the Government. We will pursue relentlessly the objective of a lasting political agreement. Our commitment to the aim of reaching a fair and balanced settlement remains undiminished.

The British Prime Minister has said that his mind is not closed. Nor is mine. In that spirit, and following on my phone call with him on Sunday, I put a series of particular issues to him on which work needs to be undertaken before our planned meeting. The matters I suggested we consider together are:

- the creation of a way forward that Sinn Fein could honourably join, and into which they would be accepted by the other participants, once the IRA campaign is over.
- whether, and how, an elective process, which is broadly acceptable, and fully within the three strand structure, and which followed from proximity talks might lead directly and speedily, without equivocation, to all party negotiations. In that context I welcome John Major's openness to the ideas of others in finding the way to a restoration of the ceasefire. I note his statement that elections would give the electoral mandates and confidence which could lead straight, and straightaway, to negotiations.

- the way in which proximity talks, which would enable the two Governments to clear up doubts and misunderstandings in the minds of the participants about all proposals, might be helpful. How these talks could enable us to be as clear as possible in advance on how the principles and modalities of the Mitchell Report would fit into any "elective process/all-party negotiations" proposal. This could deal with the real danger that because of lack of proper procedural understanding, an impasse over de-commissioning could unexpectedly paralyse negotiations at any stage.

I made very clear the Irish Government's view that the presentation of any way forward must take account of the justifiable fears of Nationalist politicians in Northern Ireland. Neither the elective approach, nor any other approach, should be presented as a foregone conclusion, or as a policy to be imposed.

This preparatory work for our meeting must also now take on board:

- first, the proposal from John Hume for referendums North and South. We believe this proposal has considerable merit as it would afford all those on this island the opportunity to state in an unique way their opposition to violence and their wish for all party negotiations. It would show that the only electoral mandate any of us have is to use exclusively peaceful methods. It would end the theology of violence, and would endorse the demand for talks without threats. The Government would be prepared to give top priority to the necessary legislation, if agreement is reached on the terms of such referendums.

- and second, the issue of how best to avail of President Clinton's offer, when I spoke to him on Friday night, of his support, and that of his Administration, for the restoration of the ceasefire.

To sum up, I am satisfied that a viable basis exists, despite the terrible act on Friday, to restore peace to the people of these islands and this time to underpin it on a democratic basis, provided that Sinn Fein use their influence for peace, and the IRA clearly say that a total cessation is again in place.

I will end by asking the IRA to think again. A quarter of a century of violence did not progress any of your political aims. Indeed, it divided Ireland more than ever before. There is no escaping the truth that bombs and bullets do not persuade people to change their minds. Violence is a bankrupt substitute for peaceful persuasion and patient negotiations.

I would urge every Deputy in this House and everybody in Ireland to join me in an unambiguous call for the restoration of the IRA ceasefire.