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NORTHERN IRELAND
Information Service

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7 October 1997

**'A GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY TO MODERNISE OUR RELATIONSHIPS,' SAYS
POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT MINISTER**

In his opening statement to Strand One of the multi-party Talks, the Minister for Political Development, Mr Paul Murphy MP, today encouraged all participants to set their eyes on the future and the chance to 'usher in a new era for Northern Ireland'.

Speaking at the opening plenary of the Strand One negotiations this morning in Castle Buildings, Stormont, he underlined the following themes:

- The Talks participants must set their eyes firmly on the future, creating a settlement that lays the foundation for a better, more stable, and more harmonious future for all citizens here;
- This is a 'golden opportunity to modernise relationships within Northern Ireland and more widely';
- All participants have committed themselves to the path of democracy - the future of Northern Ireland must be determined by peaceful negotiation alone;
- For the first time the participants are meeting when two ceasefires are in place. We hope the ceasefires will continue;
- This is an opportunity to build an agreement rooted in all strands of political opinion - the broadest spectrum since Northern Ireland was founded;
- The process will benefit if those parties who are staying away from the table return to it and make their voices heard;
- This is a chance to consider new arrangements for Northern Ireland alongside developments towards devolution in Scotland and Wales;

- The Government is committed to the principle of bringing power closer to ordinary people;
- The aim is to create a fresh start for relationships within Northern Ireland, within the island of Ireland, and between the peoples of these islands;
- Any agreement must reflect all of these aspects and the Talks have been structured to assist this quest;
- Arrangements under discussion might include elected institutions and their role in the wider relationships;
- Also under examination would be justice issues, human rights, and equal treatment for all;
- The bottom line is the consent of the people of Northern Ireland to whatever is agreed, strengthened by the 'triple lock' guarantee. The agreement must be supported in a Northern Ireland referendum, and approved by Parliament at Westminster.