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Attached is a copy of the speech given by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Rt Hon Sir Patrick Mayhew QC MP, to the Association of American Correspondents in London.

ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN CORRESPONDENTS

Ladies and gentlemen, journalists are good at skipping introductions and getting to the message. An advantage of talking to journalists, therefore, is that you need construct no introduction to your speech.

I shall do without one, therefore, but you must allow me to say thank you to David [Feingold] and the Association of American Correspondents in London, for the invitation to have lunch with you, and for the opportunity to bump up against the minds behind the word processors.

You want to know what's going to happen in Northern Ireland: what we want to happen in Northern Ireland: and what we are doing to bring it about. That is why I am invited. So I will tell you.

What is going to happen in Northern Ireland, I think, is that the inhabitants will grow ever increasingly tired of conflict and of being associated by the world with nothing else. And they are going to decide to do something radical about it, and they are going to succeed.

While I will offer you no odds at all as to when the cessation of violence will happen, I am confident that happen it will. It ought to happen now, of course: without delay, violence should end for good. Whether it will happen this

month, or even this year, I cannot tell: but the vision is no longer a mirage.

I am not asserting that the terrorists generally are weary of violence, although some may be. I am not pointing to terrorist doubts about the political value of violence. Many more may harbour those, and all of them should do. The reason why I am rash enough to predict it will happen is that it is increasingly, and in my view irreversibly, the will of the people. A surge in opinion and in sensibility has become manifest. It is continuing, and will grow, and it is not going to recede. It is not limited to one side of the community divide. It is everywhere.

In the main, people think they have put up with too much, for too long. They are sickened by the individual acts of wickedness and horror stretching back over too many years. But it is the cumulative burden of such things that has sickened people, to the extent they are determined it shall stop; and determined that the art of living together with toleration for those from whom you differ, if not with cordiality towards them, shall be discovered and practised in Northern Ireland.

And how will this operate on the men of violence? Slowly but surely their room for manoeuvre will contract, as the toleration on which they depend for their protection is withdrawn. Their intimidation will not cease, of course, but

'the power of the human spirit is such that it will cease to succeed, as more and more help so long withheld in some quarters, is given to the police.

You cannot measure such a shift of will and of opinion. But you can experience it - if you listen, and watch, and talk to people in the streets and shops and factories and homes, all of which I am able to do in this job, and which I do, and if you post reliable people to do the same.

You can hear of it if you listen to those who have known Northern Ireland for longer than I have, or who have gone away from it and are now returned. And you can learn of it from those living and working there, whose business it has been year in and year out, to take heed of public feeling. I shall be surprised if members of this Association have been unaware of these developments. For the overwhelming majority of decent people everywhere in these islands, peace, properly attained, cannot come soon enough.

That is my prediction and my faith. There are of course those who do not share either, who will argue that, of all the problems the world faces, Northern Ireland's is peculiarly and infuriatingly intractable. They review the bloody sweep of history, and are unable to visualise a different future.

So I want to remind them, and you, that the last half of the 20th Century has not been short on examples of the highly improbable, the well high impossible, coming about.

- Israel and the PLO inching towards compromise, change and mutual accommodation of interests and respect for differing identities.

- The countries of eastern Europe asserting their identities and in the process hastening the end of the old Soviet Empire.

- The ending of the Cold War, a costly and paralysing state of affairs which shaped thinking and conditioned attitudes for over 4 decades.

The force of the human spirit is invincible. It is people who can bring about "a turn-up for the books" - people determined that there shall be change, there must be change, there will be change whatever the apparent odds against, however rooted in history the old ways of doing things, of looking at the world.

The people of Northern Ireland who want that change are no longer lone voices, shouting to be heard above the bombs, the bullets and the falling rubble. The odds are shortening.

Adding to the dynamics of the process is the Joint Declaration by both the British and the Irish Governments. Both Governments commit themselves to be persuaders for peace and persuaders to agreement on the divided island of Ireland. The British Government says that its role is:

"... to encourage, facilitate and enable the achievement of such agreement over a period through a process of dialogue and co-operation based on full respect for the rights and identities of both traditions in Ireland."

That is what we are doing now in the Talks process, involving the two Governments and the four constitutional parties in Northern Ireland. We are floating ideas for fuller discussion in one format or another, that seem to us at this stage to offer the best chance of securing overall agreement in the end.

Nothing ruled out

In this search for agreement nothing is ruled out. A united Ireland; the Union: maintained neither of these, and nothing in between, is ruled out by the Joint Declaration. But what matters is what secures agreement and consent.

Whatever is agreed and consented to on the basis set out in the Joint Declaration, we will implement. But only the people living in Ireland, North and South respectively, can

determine what that agreement will be. We do not have a blueprint or a masterplan to impose. We do not have some private interest that would lead us to seek to frustrate any particular outcome which on democratic principles had been agreed. So we shall not coerce or persuade people, against their free will, to an agreement of some particular character.

Why not? Seamus Mallon made the point in the House of Commons:

"Surely, if the British Government were to decide what the Irish people would have, it would be a contradiction of the very essence of self-determination." [21 January, col 1174]

Meanwhile, the British Government says - entirely consistently with all I have said today - that so long as by its own volition, expressed by a greater number of the people living there, Northern Ireland remains part of the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland can count upon our commitment to its enjoyment of the benefits and entitlements and responsibilities that go with that status a commitment that will be honoured not grudgingly but whole-heartedly.

I want no-one to be in any doubt about what the Joint Declaration says. That is why we made [200,000] copies available to the people of Northern Ireland. That is why both I and the Prime Minister, in Parliament and in speeches

'outside, have repeatedly made clear what is in the Declaration says and what is not in it.

What we will not do is add to, take away from, or renegotiate the Declaration. There is no daylight between the two Governments on this. Both what we have said, and what Mr Reynolds and Mr Spring have said in our respective public statements on the Declaration, has been said within its parameters and spirit.

So we shall stand staunchly by the Joint Declaration. It is a guarantee that for us, as for the Irish Government, the principles of consent and democracy must underlie everything. It is a statement of constitutional principles and political realities which will not change. Whether it leads, now or later, to an end to all violence, that Declaration is going to stand.

In some quarters there is a view that the Declaration will be taken away at some time. This is not the case at all. There is no recommended shelf life. The principles of the Declaration stand; they are, I suggest, deserving of support across the board - and they have been welcomed as such in many quarters and by many groups: here in Great Britain, in Ireland, North and South and overseas, not least in America.

We shall also press ahead urgently, with the Irish Government and the main constitutional parties in Northern Ireland, on

'the Talks process initiated by Peter Brooke. For a genuine and overall settlement can only possibly be achieved by a process of talking and negotiating.

The aim of this process is a comprehensive agreement, reached by all the main parties committed exclusively to the principles of democracy, agreement and consent.

Through these Talks, both Governments want to see Northern Ireland people taking responsibility. Northern Ireland is well stocked with political talent: but there is so little work for it to do that it is wasted, sidelined and frustrated. In consequence the politics of Northern Ireland are the politics of destruction, not of building.

To this end, we want to see a political system based on agreement, which puts more power back where it properly belongs - in the hands of the people of Northern Ireland. To succeed lastingly in doing so, it must command the support and allegiance of the people of Northern Ireland from all sides. A system which has the allegiance of only one side is insufficient. So this is not a process confined to Northern Ireland alone. It is not enough to think in terms of structures internal to Northern Ireland alone.

There are great opportunities for closer and deeper co-operation in Ireland, between North and South, that are at present being missed. All of the people of the island lose

out when North and South don't work together when it is in their mutual interest. So we want to see North-South arrangements to encourage the making of common cause where interests coincide. This is - equally importantly - an element of the 3 stranded political process in which we are engaged.

That is why I am convinced that the Talks process must be continued in its 3-Stranded character. We will stick with that.

Those, then, are the governing principles and aspirations to which both Governments have freely and openly signed up. And with those principles there is sent a clear message.

It is this. There can be no conceivable excuse for violence, or for justifying its use. All those involved in violence should give it up now, for good.

The violence should end now. Not because I demand it, or the Prime Minister demands it, or the Taoiseach demands it, but because the overwhelming number of people in Ireland demand it.

I believe Seamus Mallon cut through the obfuscation when he said in the House of Commons last month:

"The vast majority of people in Ireland, north and south, unionists and nationalists, self-determined long ago that there should not be violence on the island of Ireland. Who is standing in the way of that right of self-determination? It is those who are carrying out violence" [21 January, col 1175]

In Ireland today there is no time for the misty, time-warped simplification of a complex problem peddled by NORAIID supporters. Those who justify the killing of Irish men and women may be lionised briefly, albeit damagingly, abroad. But those who live on the island of Ireland know the misery and grief which is all that the years of violence have brought. They have very recently made that plainly known. They want it to end - totally, with no ifs or buts and for good.

Therefore, we shall continue, unremittingly, to uphold the criminal law, which we resolutely require all in the public service themselves to uphold, on pain of prosecution in default. They enjoy no immunities. Last year 14 in the police and military were murdered, their most fundamental human right destroyed. That seems to be overlooked by Amnesty International. Those who break the criminal law can only expect to see their own lives blighted by long years spent in prison - a totally wasteful and futile and avoidable replay of the past 25 years.

But if violence ends, this futile cycle can be broken. Things can change in a way, and to an extent, that not many months ago few would have thought it realistic even to contemplate.

With IRA violence at a permanent end, we would enter exploratory dialogue with Sinn Fein in 3 months. Mr Adams asks what this exploratory dialogue will be about. He knows already. It was set out in our message to the IRA of 5 November, published on 29 November.

As we said then, the dialogue will be:

- to explore the basis upon which Sinn Fein would come to be admitted to an inclusive political talks process to which the British Government is committed without anticipating the negotiations within that process;
- to exchange views on how Sinn Fein would be able over a period to play the same part as the current constitutional parties in the public life of Northern Ireland;
- to examine the practical consequences of the ending of violence.

These are all serious issues. When violence ends, they will all need to be addressed.

Think what the practical consequences of ending violence will be. There will be an end to arms being carried around and used on the streets of Northern Ireland: whether by the security forces, by republicans, or by loyalists. There will be an end to all the unnecessary and tragic deaths we have seen over the last 25 years. Greysteel and Shankill are but the most vivid and recent of a litany of atrocities. Innocent people died in each. We all want to see an end to the violence, an end properly attained. If some people want to call it demilitarisation, that is their language. I call it peace.

Those who are involved in violence have the key to peace. If they turn the lock by ending violence, they will open the door to enter a process of dialogue, based only on agreement and with no outcome ruled out. We are not going to change the lock. The key will always turn it, and the door will open in no other circumstances.

But the rest of us, who are committed now to progress by peaceful means alone, we are not going to sit back in inactivity while further bloody months unfold.

No-one is going to enforce a veto on what the people overwhelmingly demand, namely progress through dialogue to a

genuine and overall settlement. It may succeed, or it may not. But those who decline to participate need to understand this. They can join the process, or they can stay out: but they cannot halt it.

These thoughts, ladies and gentlemen, comprise my hopes and my belief.