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NORTHERN IRELAND Information Service

PRIME MINISTER'S
SPEECH TO INSTITUTE OF DIRECTORS LUNCH
BELFAST, 21 OCTOBER 1994

AS DELIVERED

Mr Chairman,

From the moment I stepped into Downing Street, I believed that the overwhelming majority of the people in Northern Ireland wanted peace.

Over the years they have demonstrated this in countless ways - the remarkable peace movements of the 1970s, the many groups and individuals who have worked so hard to heal community divisions that have existed for so long.

It was that conviction that gave birth to the Downing Street Declaration. An opportunity for peace did exist and the Taoiseach, Albert Reynolds and I both wished to take advantage of it.

The Downing Street Declaration recognised the rights of both main traditions in Northern Ireland, but it threatened the interests of neither. It showed that violence had no justification - and it offered a route into legitimate politics for those who abandoned violence.

When I spoke to you in March, many people had lost hope that the Downing Street Declaration could lead to peace. I mention that only to remind everyone that we should not accept set-backs. There may be more. And, if there are, we should persist and overcome them.

I expressed hope against the prevailing wind. Today there is a chance - a chance not a certainty - that hope will become reality.

Seven months after I last spoke to you, seven weeks after the IRA ceasefire, seven days after the loyalist paramilitary ceasefire, Northern Ireland is at peace. There is a different atmosphere.

Fear has been lifted from daily life.

People have begun to take the bars from their windows.

Trade in the High Street has gone up by 6% in just a single month.

And even sceptical commentators - commentators with years of history to support and justify their scepticism - are beginning to wonder whether, perhaps, a corner may truly have been turned.

As for that, we shall see. But there has been a very encouraging beginning.

But now we have to move on. Towards a full return to democratic life. Towards a time when violence will be no more than a bad memory. Towards a just and a lasting peace.

We have practical obstacles to overcome. Some of them will be difficult. We also have history to overcome and that may be even harder. Old enmities, old suspicions, old fears still swirl around and obscure opportunities that lie ahead.

We are right to be cautious. But there is no entirely risk-free approach. With care and with calculation we must judge the art of the possible and then deliver it.

I cannot guarantee success. But I do believe that the chances of success are better than for generations.

Mr Chairman, let me set out, therefore, the next steps that I propose to take.

Our task is to make sure that the violence is over for good. We must aim to make a return to violence unthinkable.

Throughout these seven weeks, Sinn Fein and the IRA have sought to convey the impression that the ceasefire is permanent, but they have not stated this unambiguously. Because they left scope for doubt, I resisted pressure to set an early date for exploratory talks.

Instead, we have reviewed their actions. And these have been more compelling than their words.

And as a result, I am now prepared to make a working assumption that the ceasefire is intended to be permanent. This means we can move carefully towards the beginning of dialogue between Sinn Fein and the Government.

The basis for this dialogue is unchanged. There must be a genuine commitment by Sinn Fein to use and support only peaceful methods in a democratic political arena. We shall expect to see continuing practical evidence of this commitment. We shall not be able to proceed if it is called into question.

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But if we can continue reasonably to assume that Sinn Fein is establishing a commitment to exclusively peaceful methods; if the IRA continues to show that it has ended its terrorism; then we shall be ready to convene exploratory talks before this year is out.

Mr Chairman, this preliminary dialogue between representatives of the Government and of Sinn Fein will be crucial.

It will explore how Sinn Fein can make a transition to normal political life. How it would be able to play the same part as the existing constitutional parties. How it could enter the political talks process itself.

And we shall discuss the practical consequences of ending violence - most obviously how illegal weapons and explosives are going to be removed from everyday life in Northern Ireland. Peace cannot be assured finally until the paramilitaries on both sides hand in their weapons. This is a difficult issue but it cannot be ducked. We must consider therefore how guns and explosives can best be deposited and decommissioned. These weapons are both North and South of the border. So we shall be consulting the Irish Government on a coordinated approach.

It is through the political talks process that we wish to secure a lasting settlement. And I repeat today the promise that I have given before: when these talks between the constitutional parties and the two Governments are concluded, we shall seek the approval of the people of Northern Ireland for the outcome as a whole in a referendum. Their consent is essential.

As you know, Mr Chairman, the British and Irish Governments are working on a Joint Framework Document. I shall be discussing it with the Taoiseach again on Monday at Chequers.

I know in Northern Ireland that there is concern about the document. Let me repeat: it will not be a blueprint. It is intended to help further discussion and negotiation and it will represent our joint understanding of what is most likely to secure widespread acceptance.

When the document is finished, we shall publish it, for all to see. It will not be kept a secret with the danger that it will cause suspicions. As with the Downing Street Declaration, everyone will be able to get a copy, to see exactly what it says and exactly what it does not say.

This way it should neither be misunderstood or misinterpreted.

Mr Chairman, I am determined the people of Northern Ireland will have the chance to give their views. I want them to see that that document is faithful to the Downing Street Declaration and to our unshakeable constitutional guarantee that their future is in their hands.

The Joint Framework Document concentrates on relations between the two Governments, and between Northern Ireland and the Republic.

But, as part of an overall settlement, the British Government is also concerned with new arrangements for government within Northern Ireland itself. And this is a matter for discussion between the British Government and the Northern Ireland Parties.

We therefore intend to publish simultaneously our own proposals on a possible way forward within Northern Ireland. These, too, like the Joint Framework Document, will be a guide for discussions and negotiations aimed at widespread acceptance.

In this way the people of Northern Ireland will be able to see the full shape of a possible settlement. It is the overall shape of the whole package that must secure the consent of the people of Northern Ireland if it is to succeed.

Mr Chairman, we want to restore local accountability. We shall therefore include proposals for an assembly - drawing, without attribution, on the work done in the 1992 Talks and the lessons of Michael Ancram's continuing exchanges with the parties. And again, we shall be seeking a basis for broad agreement. Neither a purely internal solution, nor a return to domination of one side by the other, would achieve this. Local democracy requires support right across the community.

Mr Chairman, the loyalist ceasefire is very welcome. There are no circumstances whatsoever that would justify a resumption of their violence.

The route to democratic politics is open to all who renounce violence, and we of course want loyalists to be able to express their views democratically.

Therefore, let me make clear today, once they have sufficiently demonstrated their commitment to exclusively peaceful methods, they can take part in public life. At the appropriate time, the Government will enter into contact with them.

We will be looking for ways of taking their views into account in the talks process. We want to hear the concerns, not least the social concerns, of the communities from which they come.

Mr Chairman, in matters of security we shall not take risks. We shall not make concessions to those who defy the law. We shall not lower our guard prematurely. But of course we wish to see Northern Ireland return to a more relaxed and more normal way of life.

The ceasefire has already allowed the security forces to respond to a diminished threat. Today, on their advice, the Secretary of State has rescinded all the remaining closer orders on border crossings. This will allow freer movement, although the security forces will continue to patrol the border for the time being.

Exclusion Orders have been another constraint required to counter terrorism. We hope that the day is approaching when they will no longer be needed. The numbers are already lower than they were when Parliament renewed the Prevention of Terrorism Act last March.

Now that we are moving towards preliminary dialogue, I can announce that the Home Secretary has today lifted the Orders which excluded Mr Gerry Adams and Mr Martin McGuinness from Great Britain. They are free to travel anywhere within the United Kingdom, provided they remain committed to the democratic process.

Mr Chairman, other Exclusion Orders will remain in place for the time being but the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State to Northern Ireland will keep the need for them under review.

Let me turn now to the policing of the streets and of the countryside.

We had to deploy additional troops in Northern Ireland from 1969 in support of the police because of the level of violence. And in the years since then the Army has truly done an outstanding job for the people of Northern Ireland.

While Northern Ireland remains a part of the United Kingdom, there will always be a peacetime role for some members of the Armed Forces, just as there is in every other part of the United Kingdom. We shall keep as many policemen and troops as we need, for as long as we need to protect the people of Northern Ireland. But the need for soldiers to patrol the streets will continue to be reviewed in relation to the threat, and it is our firm objective to return to exclusively civilian policing.

Terrorism has prevented the Royal Ulster Constabulary from operating in the same way as police forces in the rest of the United Kingdom. Its officers over the years time and time again have shown extraordinary courage and tenacity. They have made many sacrifices. They have every reason to look forward to lasting peace, and to the prospect of leading more normal lives themselves.

They know that an end to the threat of violence will bring new challenges for them. They know they need to police by consent, and that they will have our full support in seeking to achieve that. But let me make it clear here and now: no groups can - or will - be allowed to take the law into their own hands. All sections of the community must have confidence in the police and must enjoy equal protection from crime. In Northern Ireland the role and duty of enforcing the law must rest with the police and with the police alone.

Mr Chairman, peace of itself will give a massive boost to Northern Ireland's economy. Equally, the chance of more prosperity, more jobs, better security for families, must be the most powerful incentive for peace.

I know that the business community is already preparing for new opportunities. So is the Government, in partnership with you.

I can announce now that we will be convening a large investment conference here in Belfast in December.

I hope that many of you will take part. We shall be asking the Institute of Directors and the CBI at national level to encourage all their members to look at investment opportunities here in Northern Ireland. We shall invite senior figures from the City of London. And we shall also invite potential investors and business leaders from overseas - from Europe, from the United States and from the Far East.

We are of course already in close touch with the European Commission. The President of the Commission has established a task force, a task force to look at new European Community programmes for Northern Ireland. This initiative aims to fund new projects to regenerate the city centres. It will focus on action to cut long term unemployment, attract inward investment and stimulate tourism to Northern Ireland.

The details of the European Commission's initiative are still being worked out, in consultation with us and with others. From my latest contacts with Jacques Delors, I am confident that this initiative will result in a substantial package of new measures and of new money for Northern Ireland.

I say new money. The European Union's programme will be in addition to the British Government's own expenditure plans for Northern Ireland. These, as you know, have long been supported by the European Union's structural funds. The Union has also increased its contribution to the International Fund for Ireland.

Let me make two further points on economic and social support.

First, we have long recognised the particular needs of Northern Ireland. We have set public spending at a level well above the UK average, and provided a subvention of over £3 billion last year to finance this.

The people of Northern Ireland will get our continued support in the future. We understand that they face exceptional economic and social difficulties. Some will result, indeed, from the transition to peace - such as the consequences for employment of an end to terrorism.

So let me assure you that the Government will take full account of Northern Ireland's special needs in setting future levels of public spending for the Province. We want to help the Province to enjoy higher levels of economic growth and much greater prosperity throughout the community in the years that lie ahead.

Second, Mr Chairman, we need your ideas, the ideas of people throughout Northern Ireland on the projects we and the European Union should back and the support that we can most usefully give. So the Government will now start consultations with business and financial interests in the Province. We shall also consult the leaders and chief executives of the local councils in Northern Ireland. They are in day to day touch with the people of Northern Ireland. So I intend shortly to issue invitations to them to meet me at Downing Street. I believe they can play a significant role in carrying forward our plans for a better future for all the people in Northern Ireland.

Mr Chairman, from this moment on we are in a new phase of the peace process. A transitional phase which will lead to exploratory talks.

For twenty five years violence has been the enemy of progress in Northern Ireland.

Think what opportunities have been lost, think what could have been done to advance all areas of life here, were it not for the burden of terrorism that the Province has carried.

Local democracy has been held back. A generation of politicians has been denied full responsibility.

In the community, walls have been going up where we should have spent the last twenty five years breaking them down.

In the economy, for every million pounds of investment that you have attracted, there should have been many millions of pounds of investment. For every tourist there should have been thirty. For every hotel, factory or shop repaired after a bomb, we could have built a new hotel or factory had there been no bomb.

Mr Chairman, we cannot make up twenty five lost years overnight. We shall have to make Herculean efforts. And that is the purpose of the initiatives that I have announced today. To begin to improve the lives of everyone in Northern Ireland as speedily and as comprehensively as we can.

Above all, we must make the price of breaking the peace so high that there would be not a shred of sympathy, not a glimmer of support for anyone who ever again contemplated the use of violence.

Every day without violence shows more clearly the benefits of peace.

Mr Chairman, the future of Northern Ireland lies in the hands of the people of Northern Ireland. Not just of those leaders - the leaders of political parties, of the churches, of the business community - who have always stood by peaceful methods. But it lies in the hands of all the people.

I know that they want peace. And they know that peace has not been brought through any secret deals or secret promises.

They know of our commitment to the balanced and even-handed principles of the Downing Street Declaration, including consent and the search for agreement among all the people living in Northern Ireland.

They will be invited to comment on the Joint Framework Document, and on our proposals for local accountability.

They will be asked to vote on the outcome of the three-stranded talks.

They must establish a just basis for living together in the future, giving parity of esteem and equity of treatment to both main traditions and enabling all law abiding citizens to live free for good from the threat of violence.

Mr Chairman, let me speak directly to each and every person in Northern Ireland. If you want peace, say so now. Loudly. Don't sit back. Join the crusade for the future. Go to your friends. Go to your neighbours. Go to anyone you know who may ever, if only for a minute, have supported violence.

You have not had such a chance in years and you cannot afford to miss it. Let your voices be heard.

Ultimately you, and you alone, the people of Northern Ireland, can ensure that Northern Ireland never goes backwards. And yours will be the gain if that enterprise is successfully.

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PRIME MINISTER'S SPEECH TO THE INSTITUTE OF DIRECTORS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Key points

Ceasefire

"I am now prepared to make a working assumption that the ceasefire is intended to be permanent".

Exploratory talks between representatives of the Government and Sinn Fein

"If we can continue reasonably to assume that Sinn Fein is establishing a commitment to exclusively peaceful methods; if the IRA continues to show that it has ended terrorism; then we shall be ready to convene exploratory talks before this year is out."

Weapons and explosives

"Peace cannot be assured finally until the Paramilitaries on both sides hand in their weapons. We must consider how guns and explosives can best be deposited and decommissioned. These weapons are both North and South of the border. So we shall be consulting the Irish Government on a coordinated approach."

Joint Framework Document (Strands Two and Three)

"When the document is finished, we shall publish it. I am determined the people of Northern Ireland will have the chance to give their views."

British Government's proposals on a way forward within Northern Ireland (Strand One)

Also to be published, for public discussion. "We shall include proposals for

Assembly" - drawing on the lessons of the 1992 talks and of Michael Ancram's exchanges.

Contacts with Loyalist Paramilitaries

The Government will enter into contact with the Loyalists at the appropriate time, once they have sufficiently demonstrated their commitment to exclusively peaceful methods.

Loyalist political representation

"We want to hear the concerns, not least the social concerns, of the communities from which they come. We shall be looking for ways of taking their views into account in the talks process."

Border crossings

The Secretary of State has today rescinded all the remaining closure orders on border crossings.

Exclusion orders

The Home Secretary has today lifted the orders excluding Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness from Great Britain. "They are free to travel anywhere within the United Kingdom, provided they remain committed to the democratic process."

Security forces

"The need for soldiers to patrol the streets will continue to be reviewed in relation to the threat, and it is our firm objective to return to exclusively civilian policing."

Law enforcement

The RUC will be seeking to police by consent. "No groups will be allowed

...e the law into their own hands. All sections of the community must have confidence in the police and must enjoy equal protection from crime."

Investment Conference

"We shall be convening a large Investment Conference in Belfast in December." Potential investors to be invited from Great Britain, Europe, the United States, and the Far East.

European Union Initiative

A special task force is developing a new European Community programme for Northern Ireland. "From my latest contacts with Jacques Delors, I am confident that this initiative will result in a substantial package of new measures and new money. The European Union's programme will be in addition to the British Government's own expenditure plans."

Future Government support for Northern Ireland

Public spending on Northern Ireland is above the UK average. "The Government will take full account of Northern Ireland's special needs in setting future levels of public spending for the Province."

Consultation on economic projects with business and local councils

Consultations to start with business and financial interests, and the leaders and chief executives of the local councils. "They are in day to day touch with people. So I intend shortly to issue invitations to them to meet me at Downing Street. They can play a significant role in carrying forward our plans for a better future."

People of Northern Ireland

"Walls have been going up where we should have spent the past 25 years breaking them down ... We cannot make up 25 lost years overnight. We