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FOR THE ATTENTION OF : NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE

FROM : Mrs Roberta Haffey - Archbishop's Secretary.

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MESSAGE :

Copy of a Statement the Archbishop is making this morning at a Press interview.

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18 July 1996

CURRENT SITUATION

The Most Reverend Dr Robin Eames, Archbishop of Armagh.

1. Following what has been generally accepted to have been one of the worst periods in our history the time has come to look ahead. The anger and resentment generated by recent events have driven new wedges of suspicion between our communities and trust has been shattered in many instances. Last week we faced the abyss. We saw it. We felt it. No one can ever again view it as imaginary.
2. I express my sincere sympathy to all who have lost loved ones in recent days, to those who have been driven from their homes, injured or threatened. Without reservation I again condemn the violence which occurred during the Drumcree stand-off and the violence which followed the parade on the Garvaghy Road. Not even anger can justify the extent of all that violence.
3. In recent days we have seen the naked face of sectarian hatred in this Province. That face has produced words and actions which are totally unacceptable in any civilised society. Sectarianism has long been the major influence in Northern Ireland. But in the past week we saw it at its very worst. No longer can anyone plead that the temperature of sectarianism has diminished. It is alive and active. That is a reality.
4. I understand the depth of feeling in Protestant and Roman Catholic areas at present. I understand the reasons for those feelings. I have received many messages telling me of Protestant and Roman Catholic reactions to events. I have met many of both traditions and together with the other Church leaders have attempted to find solutions to immediate as well as long-term problems. In our pastoral responsibilities none of us doubt the depth of those feelings at present.

Expression of Protestant feelings:

5. In recent days, religious and political leaders of the nationalist community have spoken of the feelings of their community. They have spoken of anger, resentment and uncertainty. They have expressed the need for parity of esteem, respect for deeply-held principles and due recognition of rights.

Within the Protestant community there is an equal depth of emotion at this time. So many Protestants have spoken to me of their disgust at the violence of word or action which has emanated from within their community. But they too have been the subject of attack. The burning of church buildings, homes, business property, intimidation out of homes, physical attacks on people and other threats have been inflicted on the Protestant community. Such attacks have generated the same fear and resentment in that community as have similar attacks directed against the Roman Catholic community.

6. Leaders of the nationalist community have drawn attention to the resentment caused by what is perceived as triumphalism in the loyalist community. I understand such reactions. Triumphalism is its own form of sectarianism. But such feelings on the part of nationalists must be balanced by the recognition that within the unionist community there is a perception on the part of many that their future is unsure, that their position has been eroded by events over which they have little control and that their views are being ignored. Perception such may be. But experience has shown us that the perception can quickly become the reality in Northern Ireland. This feeling is illustrated by such phrases as *"we have given in all along the line and have had nothing in return."* With all such perceptions there are those in both communities ready to manipulate fears and to build fear upon fear. This feeling is a major basis for uncertainty and lack of confidence among unionists. Somehow that uncertainty and lack of confidence must be removed and replaced by confidence which will not be a threat to their neighbours.
7. It is now more urgent than ever that political solutions are found. The statement by Senator Mitchell that he believes there are grounds for hope that political dialogue is possible, is encouraging

to us all. No one doubts the overwhelming yearning for peace. But equally no one should under-estimate the problems facing political leaders. We all appeal to them to re-double their efforts to find a political solution. A political solution acceptable across the board could solve so many other issues. A failure to find it would condemn us all to years of misery.

8. But the political process of its own will not solve all our problems. A concerted united campaign to convince people of both traditions that they have a part to play is essential. At all costs people have to feel that they own the peace process and are not merely spectators.
9. This is a time for all Christians to pray in their churches and in their homes for our situation. The power of prayer is a powerful influence on events. We must continually seek the strength of God as we seek a just way forward.

PRACTICAL ISSUES

Despite the depth of feeling and the lack of trust I feel we must now seek to move forward. We must remember the lessons of the past few weeks. We must allow the anger to be replaced by reasonableness. We must not just go back to the drawing-board. We must discover the drawing board itself.

(a) Political Issues:

1. This is a time when the political process is under severe scrutiny. The question is whether that process is capable of matching the needs of this hour. It is a time for forceful and honest expression of party political positions.

While it is inevitable that procedural questions must be faced in the current political discussions there is a growing wish throughout the country to see real political dialogue commence. Such dialogue would do much to fill the vacuum which can too easily be

filled by other than politicians. The urgency of such discussions cannot be over-emphasised.

The commencement of political dialogue with the acceptance of the Mitchell Principles is now more urgent than ever.

2. The restoration of the ceasefire by the PIRA would affect much more than the party political process. It would be another step along the long road to building new trust.

I commend the loyalist paramilitaries on the maintenance of their ceasefire under great provocation. They have not always received due recognition of this position.

3. We must face reality at this time. Northern Ireland is a part of the United Kingdom. No change in that status can take place without the consent of a majority of its people. This fact is acknowledged by both the British and Irish governments.

Such provision **should** provide confidence to unionists and allow them to indicate wide generosity in their attitudes to nationalists. It should also encourage every effort to exhibit respect, parity of esteem and justice for nationalists, their fellow citizens in the Province. Unionist confidence should be matched with responsibility.

Equally nationalists can do much to acknowledge the feelings of unionists and thereby make a contribution to overall community confidence. Beyond their justified anger at recent events nationalists must find a new sense of belonging, identity with and responsibility to the state in which they live. The unionist perception that nationalists have never accepted the validity of the state in Northern Ireland continues to influence their attitude towards their Roman Catholic neighbours.

This sense of identity in a state both communities can respect and to which they give their allegiance holds the key to relationships between the two traditions. It must be a two-way process involving mutual respect of religious, political and cultural identities.

b. Religion:

1. It has long been claimed that there is a crisis of religious/party political identity in Northern Ireland. It has also been claimed that over-identification of religious labels with political identities has caused the crisis. We can no longer ignore the purely religious dimension to our problems. There is a lack of trust between Protestants and Roman Catholics. The Churches must accept their responsibility for this situation. They cannot wash their hands of their part together with other influences for a failure to prevent sectarian attitudes. Much has been achieved of late in inter Church understanding. But the past few weeks have shown how much has failed. It is surely the duty of each Church to re-examine what it can do to overcome sectarian division. This must be for the Churches a major challenge.
2. In our Christian witness Christians must find new ways of expressing the universality of the Gospel of love. While expressing the genuine feelings of its members each Church must take seriously its responsibility for building real bridges across the divide.

c. Parades:

In both communities parades and processions are a part of their tradition. There are parades which have a religious, a political, a commemorative or a protest element to them. It is important to note that it is a minority of such occasions which generate public disorder. However such parades attract much publicity and present a divisive picture of this society across the world.

The right to march and the right to protest can be and are on occasions manipulated for purposes beyond the aims of the event itself.

It is important to note that much more is involved in the issue of parades than questions of a right to march or a right to object. Parades are a cameo of Northern Ireland's divisions. A political solution acceptable to the whole community would do much to reduce the problem of parades in either community.

The Secretary of State has announced a review of the parades issue. It remains to be seen what will be involved in this review. But in the light of recent events it must be addressed as a matter of great urgency. It must not be put on a '*long finger*'. The Government has a clear duty to proceed without delay in this regard.

I would suggest from my experience some possible steps towards a resolution of the problems of contentious parades:

1. Where possible as long before the date of a parade occurs as possible every effort should be made to reach a balance between the right to march and the views of those who oppose it. Mediation is desirable and agreement essential. But it is impossible to solve such issues at short notice.

There is no real substitute to agreement beforehand in such cases.

2. Where agreement is impossible at that early stage each party should be allowed a further limited period of reflection in which accommodation may still be possible.
3. Failing agreement at these preliminary stages society has a right to expect some provision for adjudication be it a judicial or other official body.

d. Policing:

There is no more sensitive aspect of our community than that of policing. In many instances society has looked to the police to achieve what it has not been able to achieve itself. In the divisions of Northern Ireland the police are in a '**no-win situation**'. However no difficulty or dilemma can ever be an excuse for behaviour or conduct which falls below the high standards expected of police in any democratic society. It must be acknowledged that no other European police force has been subjected to such pressure, physical attack or prolonged period of terrorism than the R.U.C. There are many people in both communities who owe their lives to the R.U.C. The sacrifice of the R.U.C. during 25 years of terrorism is too easily forgotten.

7.

Acceptability of the police throughout the community it seeks to serve is essential if it is to do its work effectively. At present that acceptability does not exist in the nationalist community. The perception that the police have dealt less fairly with nationalists than unionists exists throughout the Roman Catholic community. In the unionist community attitudes to the R.U.C. have fluctuated depending on changing circumstances. In both communities accusations of political involvement and influence in decisions appear frequently.

Acceptability of the police in any community depends on various factors. In Northern Ireland it cannot be separated from a political solution to the wider problems of the Province. As long as we lack a political solution agreeable to the entire community policing will continue to be in a **'no-win situation.'**

Integrity and fairness of treatment of both communities must not only be the norm but be seen to be the norm. What form the police will take in the years ahead, how it is constructed and how it will find acceptability will be dictated by political solutions to political problems.

No police force can be expected to solve the problems the rest of the community has failed to address.

But even in a period of reform there is no substitute for an impartial, independent police force in Northern Ireland.