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Press release

Joint communiqué of the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference

A meeting of the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference (BIIGC) took place at Dublin Castle on 24 June 2021.

From:

Northern Ireland Office (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/northern-ireland-office>), The Rt Hon Brandon Lewis MP (<https://www.gov.uk/government/people/brandon-lewis>), and Robin Walker MP (<https://www.gov.uk/government/people/robin-walker>)

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A meeting of the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference (BIIGC) took place at Dublin Castle on 24 June 2021.

The Government of Ireland was represented by Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Simon Coveney TD, and the Minister for Justice, Mrs Heather Humphreys TD. The Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland was represented by Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Rt Hon Brandon Lewis CBE MP, and Robin Walker MP, Minister of State at the Northern Ireland Office.

The Conference was established under Strand Three of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement “to promote bilateral co-operation at all levels on all matters of mutual interest within the competence of both Governments”.

The Conference discussed the following:

East-West Matters

The Irish and UK Governments affirmed the unique relationship between their two countries and the strong bilateral cooperation that takes place at all levels of government and across a range of important policy areas.

They discussed the shared ambitions for the future of the UK-Ireland relationship and noted in this context discussions between the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach during their meeting in May 2021, and looked forward to further such engagements between the Prime Minister and Taoiseach.

Economic Co-operation

Both the UK and Irish Governments considered the critical importance of economic co-operation. The UK Government welcomed the opening of the Irish Consulate in Manchester, and recognised how this will further bolster the ties between both countries. The Conference agreed to examine new ways in which the two Governments and the Northern Ireland Executive can work together on areas of mutual economic interest, including on research and innovation, to ensure sustainable and equitable growth across these islands.

The Conference also provided updates on cooperation on the socio-economic development of the North West region. The Conference noted the continuing and shared commitment to promoting greater reconciliation and the potential for future progress, including through the International Fund for Ireland.

Security Co-operation

The Conference examined the current security situation, and discussed the continuing threat posed by terrorism and paramilitary activity in Northern Ireland.

The Conference noted the importance of the high level of co-operation between the two jurisdictions to tackle terrorism and associated criminality.

Both the Irish Government and the UK Government recalled their commitments to the 2015 Fresh Start Agreement to ending paramilitarism. They noted the ongoing work of the Independent Reporting Commission and its importance in reporting on this vital work.

Rights and Citizenship Matters

The two Governments discussed the continuing vital importance of the Common Travel Area and its associated rights and privileges. The Conference recalled the steps taken to further strengthen the Common Travel Area, including the signature of the Memorandum of Understanding on the CTA, and the agreement on the Convention on Social Security and in 2019, the agreement on a Memorandum of Understanding on CTA Healthcare Arrangements in 2020, and the adoption of relevant legislation in both jurisdictions.

Legacy

The Conference discussed the urgent need to make progress on a collective basis on Northern Ireland legacy issues in a way that supports information recovery and reconciliation, complies fully with international human rights obligations, and that responds to the needs of victims and survivors, and society as a whole.

The UK and Irish Governments agreed there was a need for a process of intensive engagement in the period immediately ahead with the Northern Ireland parties and others on legacy issues. It was agreed that this would need to build on previous discussions around the implementation of the Stormont House Agreement and to take account of the views of all participants including new proposals which the UK Government intended to bring forward. They agreed that the interests and perspectives of victims and survivors, and all those most directly affected by the Troubles, had to be central to the discussions.

The UK and Irish Governments also discussed issues of concern in respect to a number of individual legacy cases.

Political Stability

The Conference reviewed political developments since the last meeting in May 2019 and welcomed the restoration of all the political institutions of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement following the New Decade, New Approach agreement in January 2020.

The Irish and UK Governments confirmed their shared determination to work together to maintain political stability across the devolved institutions. The Conference agreed to continue close co-operation in accordance with the three-stranded approach established in the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement.

COVID-19 Recovery

The Conference considered the impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on both jurisdictions. Both the UK and Irish Governments discussed developments in relation to international travel, including the importance of monitoring of any evolving variants and reaffirmed their commitment to close cooperation on recovery.

Future Meetings

It was agreed that the Conference would meet again in early November.

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