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Statement by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Defence Simon Coveney T.D.

Statement

18 May 2022

Statement by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Defence Simon Coveney T.D. on the publication of the UK Government’s “Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Bill”

The UK Government’s Legacy Bill was published yesterday. As this is my Department’s first sight of the Bill, it will take time review it in detail and consider its proposed provisions, along with other relevant Government Departments.

However, I want to be clear that it is disappointing that the UK Government have chosen to unilaterally introduce legislation, when our starting point was the need for an agreement to be reached between both Governments and the parties, and with the needs of victims and survivors at the heart of the process.

We know, from long experience, that lasting progress is best achieved through finding an agreed way forward based on engagement and sufficient consensus. We already had the basis for that in the Stormont House Agreement.

We had strongly urged the British Government to come back to the table and find a way forward together, and it is regrettable that they have not done so. We remain open to that.

We will be speaking with the political parties and to victims groups to hear their views, which is crucial, just as it was in

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the process leading up to the Stormont House Agreement.

We will also have detailed questions to raise with the UK Government to better understand the intent behind the Bill's provisions.

However, on an initial reading we have serious concerns, which include, but are not limited to, the powers of the Commission and Chief Commissioner, the status of the 'reviews' proposed in the Bill, and of course, fundamentally, compliance with Article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights and other international human rights obligations.

I know that many families will be upset by the publication of this Bill, including those waiting for inquests or pursuing civil litigations. There will be many that understandably feel that immunity, conditional or otherwise, may be more about protecting perpetrators instead of pursuing justice and getting to the truth in such cases. It is vital that those concerns are heard and fully understood. It is also vital that the process for dealing with the legacy build rather than erode trust and confidence. Ultimately, genuine reconciliation can only be achieved through such trust and confidence.

We will continue to engage with the UK Government, at all levels, to better understand the provisions of this bill and the policy intent, but at this initial stage, I have serious concerns and cannot support it in its current form.

ENDS

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