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Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

Mrs Eileen Bell MLA
Presiding Officer
The Assembly
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Eileen,

You will have received my letter of 11 May setting out the matters which I am referring for the first week of Assembly business.

I know from our discussions that you are fully aware of the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead and I have every hope that you will be able to oversee the rapid transition of the Assembly to full devolution. There will, of course, be obstacles to overcome and they must be overcome if MLAs are not to stand accused of perpetuating the democratic deficit which Northern Ireland has seen in recent years. But, given the bitter history of Northern Ireland, it is important that we recognise and understand the difficulties for all sides in what the Assembly is now being asked to do. No-one underestimates the challenges ahead and the divisions which remain.

If we are to heal those divisions then this must be a time to focus on what unites us. All the political parties, the British and Irish Governments and, most importantly, the people of Northern Ireland, are united in their belief that devolution and power-sharing are the only way to establish an enduring, stable future. That is why the Assembly has been recalled with the express purpose of electing a First and Deputy First Minister and forming an Executive, with the opportunity to consider issues of vital importance for their constituents. Now is the time for Northern Ireland's politicians to shoulder this responsibility for their people's future, as they have been



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elected to do; it is time to open a new chapter of stability, opportunity and restored devolution in Northern Ireland.

As I have said before, the decisions which will have to be taken are not easy ones, but history has presented us all with a decisive opportunity to move forward in the coming weeks. The tragic events of recent days have once again shown how desperately the people of Northern Ireland need a new vision for a truly shared society. I know that the promise of a better future for the young people of Northern Ireland will be uppermost in the minds of all MLAs as they approach the days ahead in a spirit of partnership and generosity.

RT. HON. PETER HAIN MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND