

**STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER**  
**ON NORTHERN IRELAND**

I warmly welcome today's statement by General de Chastelain on IRA decommissioning and the separate statement by the independent witnesses. This is an important development in the peace process and one we have all been waiting for, for a long time.

The Government is very grateful to General John de Chastelain and his colleagues Andy Sens and Tauno Nieminen for their authoritative and effective oversight of this process.

I particularly welcome General de Chastelain's confirmation that IRA decommissioning is complete and that the amount of arms and material decommissioned by the IRA is consistent with the assessments provided by the security services of the two governments last year.

Successive British governments have sought final and complete decommissioning by the IRA for over ten years. Failure to deliver it had become a major impediment to moving forward the peace process. Today it is finally accomplished. And we have made an important step in the transition from conflict to peace in Northern Ireland.

If the IMC confirm that all other activity has ceased then that transition, as far as the IRA are concerned, will be complete.

While recognising the great significance of today's announcement we must always be mindful of the victims of violence whose families continue to live with their pain. The true importance of today is that these weapons can never again be used to inflict suffering and create more victims.

The involvement of representatives of the Protestant and Catholic faiths as independent witnesses in the process is new and significant and should give added confidence to both communities that IRA decommissioning is both complete and permanent.

A demand first made over a decade ago has now been met. People may complain that it has taken too long to deliver, and some may still be sceptical about republican intentions, but I ask that everyone pauses and listens to the independent voice of General de Chastelain, who has in the past not been afraid to voice his frustration with the failure to make progress, and the voices of the two independent witnesses, when they confirm that IRA decommissioning has now successfully completed and independently verified. We call on all other parliamentary groups now to cooperate with IICD on the immediate destruction of their weapons.

I recognize that after their disappointments of the past confidence will not be re-built overnight. But that should not blind us to the true significance of the progress now being made to implement the commitments made by the IRA in July and to remove a key obstacle to progress. The British government will continue to implement its obligations under the Belfast Agreement and the Joint Declaration. In time we believe this will lead to the restoration of devolved government and to a more peaceful future for Northern Ireland.

26 September 2005