

Paksley

this. The church where a Protestant congregation, the Mountain Lodge Pentecostal Assembly, was massacred some time ago has been burned down since this ceasefire. And there have been other atrocities carried out by the IRA.

I would like to say to this House today that Gerry Adams, the IRA Sinn Féin Leader, refuses to say that this ceasefire is permanent and yesterday in the USA warned that if the IRA did not get a suitable settlement then a new leadership in three years could recommence the armed struggle.

*(The President urged the speaker to conclude)*

I might say in closing that I welcome paragraph 3 of the EPP resolution which calls on all paramilitary organizations, whether republican or loyalist, to implement a permanent cessation of violence and to pursue their political objectives through the democratic process.

Hume (PSE). – Mr President, first of all might I begin by expressing my deep appreciation to the Council and to the Commission for their statements today. Those statements are extremely encouraging, particularly at the present time. One of the things that we have to do at this stage of our process is give hope to our young people in areas of very high unemployment. I thank both the Council and the Commission for their statements.

I also want to express my deep appreciation to President Hänsch for his statement at the last meeting of this Parliament. It was a very moving occasion, in particular the minute of silence observed for all those who have lost their lives in this conflict in Northern Ireland, because those 3,500 people from all sections of our community who have lost their lives are victims of our history and of our failure to resolve this problem. The figure is the equivalent of 100,000 people being killed in Britain. Not only were 30,000 people maimed but it has been necessary to build 13 walls to separate and protect one section of a Christian people from another in the city of Belfast, which has the highest rate of church-going in Western Europe.

I often regard those walls first of all as a total indictment of all of us because it is our attitudes that have built them. The positive way to look at them is that they are a challenge to us because the challenge really is that we all, all of us, have to change our past attitudes if we are to bring those walls down and secure lasting peace. Fundamental to that approach is that it is people that have rights, not territory – people, human beings. Without people any piece of earth is only a jungle. When people are divided they can only be brought together by agreement and that agreement must respect the heritage and rights of all traditions.

I thank my colleagues for their support for direct dialogue with the political wing of the IRA, for many people have heavily criticized me for it. I have seen and lived through conflict for 25 years. I have known many of the people killed. My own home on many occasions has been attacked because of my opposition to violence. But given that five governments and 20,000 troops did not stop the killing, I felt that if by direct dialogue you could save a single human life, it was my duty to embark upon it. I am glad that in the end my dialogue led to the total cessation that the IRA have announced. I would like to pay a very strong tribute to both Prime Ministers, Prime Minister

Major and Taoiseach Albert Reynolds, for putting this matter right at the top of their agenda because it is the greatest human problem facing both countries.

Throughout this I have been very much inspired, I have to say, by my experience in this House and my experience of Europe. Because what we have here, with the Council present and the Commission present in this Parliament, is the greatest achievement of conflict resolution in the history of the world. When we look back 50 years and see 35 million people dead across this continent for a second time in this century, we must ask who could have stood up then and forecast that we would be all together here today – the Council, the governments, the Commission and representatives of the peoples then at war. Yet, as I often say, the German people are still German, the French are still French, the English are still English. The lesson of that conflict resolution has to be learned in every area of conflict in the world because we have here in this House the message of peace for everywhere. The answer is very simple, as all profundities are simple: difference is not a threat. That is what war and conflict is about, seeing difference as a threat. There are no two human beings in the entire human race who are the same. Difference is an accident of birth and the accident of birth, whether it is creed, colour or nationality, should never be the cause of hatred or conflict. Humanity transcends nationality. That is a fundamental principle of conflict resolution.

Let us also apply now to our small island the same principles and let us do what Europe did, build institutions which respect our diversity but which allow us to work our common ground together, which is economics; as I often say, let us spill our sweat and not our blood and in so doing begin the evolutionary healing process of breaking down the barriers of prejudice, distrust and hatred that have divided our people for centuries.

*(FR)* Finally, I add that I am very pleased to address you here today, in Strasbourg, as no other city in the world has experienced the reality of conflict more than Strasbourg. This is why, for myself and for all areas of conflict, Strasbourg is the capital of hope and this Parliament is the Parliament of hope.

*(Loud applause)*

Nicholson (PPE). – Mr President, I would also first like to thank the Commission and the Council for their statements today. I think they will be important in the months and years ahead. I should also like to pass on my thanks to the President of Parliament for the measured statement he made in Brussels at the last sitting of this House.

Today I should first like to pay tribute to my people – the people of Northern Ireland – for their strength and resilience over the past 25 years in standing fast against the most vicious and vile campaign ever designed to destroy their freedom and their future. They have defeated the terrorists in their aim and objective and it is they, the people of Northern Ireland, who have won this war.

I would ask this House to remember that there are still those at large in Northern Ireland with a tremendous potential to kill and destroy. Not until we have a permanent cessation of violence by every para-military organization and a surrender of arms by everyone will real peace ever be found. I support the steady approach of John Major to ascertain if they really mean what they say.