

SDLP

The Acceptance Speech by

**JOHN HUME MP MEP
NOBEL LAUREATE**



**1998 Nobel Peace Prize Ceremony
Oslo City Hall
Thursday 10 December 1998**



**Takkatale Ved
JOHN HUME MP MEP
Vinner Av Nobel Fredspris 1998
Oslo Radhus
Torsdag 10. Desember**



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**John Hume MP MEP Nobel Laureate in Oslo
with family and friends**

JOHN HUME MP MEP NOBEL LAUREATE

ACCEPTANCE SPEECH

I would like to begin by expressing my deep appreciation and gratitude to the Nobel Committee for bestowing this honour on me today. I am sure that they share with me the knowledge that, most profoundly of all, we owe this peace to the ordinary people of Ireland, particularly those of the North who have lived and suffered the reality of our conflict. I think that David Trimble would agree that this Nobel prize for peace is in the deepest sense a powerful recognition of the compassion and humanity of all the people we represent between us.

In the past 30 years of our conflict there have been many moments of deep depression and outright horror. Many people wondered whether the words of W.B Yeats might come true

“Too long a sacrifice
Can make a stone of the heart”.

Endlessly our people gathered their strength to face another day and they never stopped encouraging their leaders to find the courage to resolve this situation so that our children could look to the future with a smile of hope. This is indeed their prize. I am convinced they understand that. They will take strong encouragement from today and it will powerfully strengthen our peace process.

Today the world commemorates the adoption 50 years ago of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is right and proper that today is also a day associated internationally with peace because the basis of peace and stability, in any society, has to be the fullest respect for the human rights of all its people. It is therefore right and proper that the European Convention of Human Rights is to be incorporated into the domestic law of our land as an element of the Good Friday Agreement.

In my own work for peace, I was very strongly inspired by my European experience. I always tell this story, and I do so because it is so simple yet so profound and so applicable to conflict resolution anywhere in the world. On my first visit to Strasbourg in 1979 as a member of the European Parliament, I went for a walk across the bridge from Strasbourg to Kehl.

Strasbourg is in France.

Kehl is in Germany.

They are very close. I stopped in the middle of the bridge and I meditated. There is Germany - there is France. If I had stood on this bridge 30 years ago after the end of the Second World War when 25 million people lay dead across our continent for the second time in this century and if I had said: “Don’t worry. In 30 years time we will all be together in a new Europe, our conflicts and wars will be ended and we will be working together in our common interests”, I would have been sent to a psychiatrist. But it has happened and it is now clear that European Union is the best example in the history of the world of conflict resolution. It is the duty of everyone, particularly those who live in areas of conflict, to study how it was done and to apply its principles to their own conflict resolution.

All conflict is about difference, whether the difference is race, religion or nationality. The European visionaries demonstrated that difference is not a threat, difference is natural. Difference is of the essence of humanity. Difference is an accident of birth and it should therefore never be the source of hatred or conflict. The answer to difference is to respect it. Therein lies a most fundamental principle of peace - respect for diversity.

The peoples of Europe then created institutions which respected their diversity - a Council of Ministers, the European Commission and the European Parliament - but allowed them to work together in their common and substantial economic interest. They spilt their sweat and not their blood and by doing so broke down the barriers of distrust of centuries and the new Europe has evolved and is still evolving, based on agreement and respect for difference.

That is precisely what we are now committed to doing in Northern Ireland. Our Agreement, which was overwhelmingly endorsed by the people, creates institutions which respect diversity but ensure that we work together in our common interest. Our Assembly is proportionately elected so that all sections of our people are represented. Any new administration or government will be proportionately elected by the members of the Assembly so that all sections will be working together. There will also be institutions between both parts of Ireland and between Britain and Ireland that will also respect diversity and work the common ground.

Once these institutions are in place and we begin to work together in our very substantial common interests, the real healing process will begin and we will erode the distrust and prejudices of our past and our new society will evolve, based on agreement and respect for diversity. The identities of both sections of our people will be respected and there will be no victory for either side.

We have also had enormous solidarity and support from right across the world which has strengthened our peace process. We in Ireland appreciate this solidarity and support - from the United States, from the European Union, from friends around the world - more than we can say.

The achievement of peace could not have been won without this goodwill and generosity of spirit. We should recall too on this formal occasion that our springtime of peace and hope in Ireland owes an overwhelming debt to several others who devoted their passionate intensity and all of their skills to this enterprise: to the Prime Ministers, Tony Blair and Bertie Ahern, to the President of the United States of America Bill Clinton and the European President Jacques Delors and Jacques Santer and to the three men who so clearly facilitated the negotiations, Senator George Mitchell former Leader of the Senate of the United States of America, Harri Holkeri of Finland and General John de Chastelain of Canada. And, of course, to our outstanding Secretary of State, Mo Mowlam.

We in Ireland appreciate this solidarity and support - from the United States; from the European Union, from friends around the world - more than we can say. The achievement of peace could not have been won without this good will and generosity of spirit. Two major political traditions share the island of Ireland. We are destined by history to live side by side. Two representatives of these political traditions stand here today. We do so in shared fellowship and a shared determination to make Ireland, after the hardship and pain of many years, a true and enduring symbol of peace.

Too many lives have already been lost in Ireland in the pursuit of political goals. Bloodshed for political change prevents the only change that truly matters: in the human heart. We must now shape a future of change that will be truly radical and that will offer a focus for real unity of purpose: harnessing new forces of idealism and commitment for the benefit of Ireland and all its people.

Throughout my years in political life, I have seen extraordinary courage and fortitude by individual men and women, innocent victims of violence. Amid shattered lives, a quiet heroism has born silent rebuke to the evil that violence represents, to the carnage and waste of violence, to its ultimate futility.

I have seen a determination for peace become a shared bond that has brought together people of all political persuasions in Northern Ireland and throughout the island of Ireland.

I have seen the friendship of Irish and British people transcend, even in times of misunderstanding and tensions, all narrower political differences. We are two neighbouring islands whose destiny is to live in friendship and amity with each other. We are friends and the achievement of peace will further strengthen that friendship and, together, allow us to build on the countless ties that unite us in so many ways.

The Good Friday Agreement now opens a new future for all the people of Ireland. A future built on respect for diversity and for political difference. A future where all can rejoice in cherished aspirations and beliefs and where this can be a badge of honour, not a source of fear or division.

The Agreement represents an accommodation that diminishes the self-respect of no political tradition, no group, no individual. It allows all of us - in Northern Ireland and throughout the island of Ireland - to now come together and, jointly, to work together in shared endeavour for the good of all.

No-one is asked to yield their cherished convictions or beliefs. All of us are asked to respect the views and rights of others as equal of our own and, together, to forge a covenant of

shared ideals based on commitment to the rights of all allied to a new generosity of purpose.

That is what a new, agreed Ireland will involve. That is what is demanded of each of us.

The people of Ireland, in both parts of the island, have joined together to passionately support peace. They have endorsed, by overwhelming numbers in the ballot box, the Good Friday Agreement. They have shown an absolute and unyielding determination that the achievement of peace must be set in granite and its possibilities grasped with resolute purpose.

It is now up to political leaders on all sides to move decisively to fulfil the mandate given by the Irish people: to safeguard and cherish peace by establishing agreed structures for peace that will forever remove the underlying causes of violence and division on our island.

There is now, in Ireland, a passionate sense of moving to new beginnings.

I salute all those who made this possible: the leaders and members of all the political parties who worked together to shape a new future and to reach agreement; the Republican and Loyalist movements who turned to a different path with foresight and courage; people in all parts of Ireland who have led the way for peace and who have made it possible.

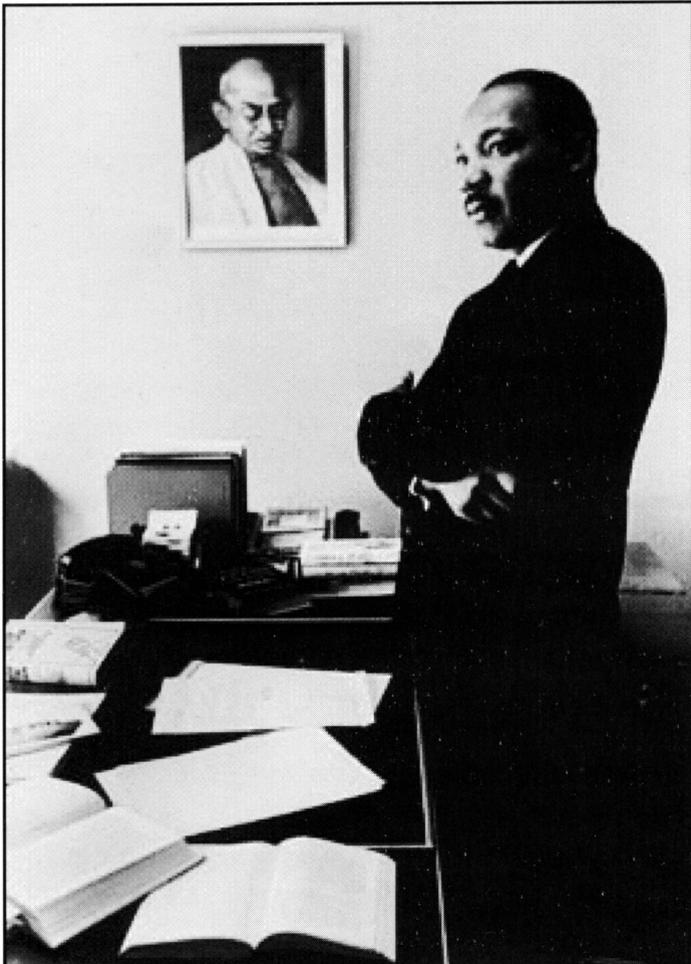
And so, the challenge now is to grasp and shape history: to show that past grievances and injustices can give way to a new generosity of spirit and action.

I want to see Ireland - North and South - the wounds of violence healed, play its rightful role in a Europe that will, for all Irish people, be a shared bond of patriotism and new endeavour.

I want to see Ireland as an example to men and women everywhere of what can be achieved by living for ideals, rather than fighting for them, and by viewing each and every person as worthy of respect and honour.

I want to see an Ireland of partnership where we wage war on want and poverty, where we reach out to the marginalised and dispossessed, where we build together a future that can be as great as our dreams allow.

The Irish poet, Louis MacNiece wrote words of affirmation and hope that seem to me to sum up the challenges now facing all of us - North and South, Unionist and Nationalist - in Ireland.



Martin Luther King Jr

“By a high star our course is set,
Our end is life. Put out to sea.”

That is the journey on which we in Ireland are now embarked.

Today, as I have said, the world also commemorates the adoption fifty years ago, of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. To me there is a unique appropriateness, a sort of poetic fulfilment, in the coincidence that my fellow Laureate and I, representing a community long divided by the forces of a terrible history, should jointly be honoured on this day. I humbly accept this honour on behalf of a people who, after many years of strife, have finally made a commitment to a better future in harmony together. Our commitment is grounded in the very language and the very principles of the Universal Declaration itself. No greater honour could have been done me or the people I speak here for on no more fitting a day.

I will now end with a quotation of total hope, the words of a former Laureate, one of my great heroes of this century, Martin Luther King Jr.

“We shall overcome.”

Thank you.

John Hume
Nobel Laureate
MP MEP

