

Speech by John Hume MP MEP, Leader of the SDLP
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Party members, delegates, friends and distinguished visitors

Thank you so much for your kind welcome. It reflects the deep and true support offered to me over so many years. It illustrates the **passion** and the **conviction** that exists in the SDLP. It underlines my sense of **optimism** today that this party's commitment to building the new Ireland is stronger than it has ever been before.

You stand with me today just as you have stood with me over the past thirty-one years. Many of you have been around for longer than you may care to remember. But never forget that you have dedicated your lives to a cause that is just. Never lose hope as the SDLP works to create the new agreed Ireland in which we so strongly believe. Never give up in the search for justice, hope and opportunity for all our people and for our young people in particular.

For many more of you - especially those of you in the audience who are too young to remember the civil rights movement, or the formation of the SDLP, or the pain and anguish of losing dear friends along the way, or the triumph of political success - this is your first SDLP conference. I am proud of all we have achieved as a party. And I am excited today by the future that lies ahead of us. We have laid the foundations for the new agreed Ireland.

To the young members of our party, I say this today. This weekend you will be handed the baton of change and opportunity for the SDLP. Your generation will play its part in shaping the future direction of politics on this island and in building a new Ireland. **Play your part**. Do not choose the course of comfort. Do not leave the job in hand to someone else. It is your job. This is your time and this is your challenge.

While I speak to you today for the last time as party leader, I am looking forward to continuing to represent the people of Northern Ireland in the European Parliament and the people of Foyle at Westminster. I am also determined to play my part in fulfilling the huge potential of the international good will that exists towards the peace process, by working tirelessly to promote the North of Ireland on the world stage, particularly on inward investment and job creation.

In my continuing capacity as your member of the European Parliament, I intend to continue and develop the tradition that makes us **the principal voice of Northern Ireland in Europe and the principal voice of Europe in Northern Ireland.**

We have been consistent on Europe. We have a solid record of achievement in Europe. And we have a vision for the future of Europe. Our track record on Europe, and in Europe, in this community is second to none, and not just on this island. Very few parties in Europe have achieved as much as we have in the European Union, particularly parties of our relatively small scale.

We have developed substantial influences in Europe through our links with our sister parties across Europe. Because of these links as leader of our party I meet twice every year with the leaders of our sister Social Democratic and Labour parties in Europe, many of whom are Prime Ministers. This has given us enormous influence and achievements for Northern Ireland at European level.

We were correct in identifying Europe, all those years ago, as crucial to our future. We are the only major party in Northern Ireland in favour of European Union. Where would we be today, our economy in particular, as well, of course, as our farmers if we were not in the European Union?

The evidence of the material benefits of EU membership is all around us, some of it more visible than other aspects. The development of our transport infrastructure, much of it supported by the European Union, is obvious. Less obvious are the improvements in telecommunications, energy supplies and even in water supply financed by the European Union.

Through the years so many of the major developments in EU support for our region have been achieved through our political contacts. We won Less Favoured Status for our farmers, for whom the Common Agricultural Policy has also been greatly beneficial.

Since the cease-fires of 1994, we have also received 100 million Euro a year for the Special PEACE programme and will continue to do so until 2004. This initiative is unique in my experience. Thanks to our efforts, and because of our direct political contacts with our sister parties in Europe, we have achieved this special peace programme specifically designed to address the problems of our region. No other region in Europe has ever won this kind of support from the EU. And we should be proud of our indispensable role in putting Northern Ireland on the EU agenda.

We must not forget the political importance of the EU either. It has been an inspiration to us all in the search for peace in these islands. The structures of the EU are clearly reflected in our new political institutions. It has helped us to develop the habit of working together within Northern Ireland and between the two parts of the island, as well as transforming relations within these islands. It has helped to create a more outward looking society. But we have to look forward as well. We have been the only party of Europe in Northern Ireland. That is a role we must continue to play.

In addition I believe that Northern Ireland must join the Euro as early as is feasible. Notwithstanding the obvious need for an appropriate economic

climate and context, entry to the Euro would make good sense for Northern Ireland. Given our peripheral location within the European Union and our geographic border with the Republic, who have of course embraced monetary union, it is imperative that Northern Ireland accepts the Euro. And of course the logic of a single market is a single currency and given that 59% of the exports of Northern Ireland industry is to the European Union, it is absolutely essential for the preservation of their exports and for their increase that we enter the Euro. We must continue to maximise the advantages of EU membership and to exploit the economic and social opportunities.

Later today, my friend and colleague, **Seamus Mallon**, will address conference for the final time as deputy leader of this party. Seamus Mallon is a man for whom I - like so many people from so many backgrounds - have the utmost respect. His commitment to peaceful and democratic politics is second to none. His **integrity** and **honesty** have helped him serve the people of Newry & Armagh with distinction for many years. His performance during his tenure as Deputy First Minister in the Assembly proved that it is possible to transcend traditional political boundaries while retaining one's own core beliefs and values. He is an **inspirational figure** for this party and for the people of Ireland and he deserves our sincere thanks and praise today for his immense contribution to Irish politics.

For over twenty years Seamus and myself have shared the helm of the SDLP. We have worked hard together and with many others to fulfil the objectives of our party. I believe that we can say with some confidence, we have done a reasonable job.

These past thirty years have indeed been difficult. But we always knew that what we were doing was right. We knew that a way out from violence and despair could be found. We knew that a political process that included representatives of all sections of the community in Northern Ireland, as well as the Irish and British governments, had the potential to transform our society on the basis of agreement, consensus and partnership. We knew we had the right ideas to effectively address the fundamental problems in our society.

Over many years, others have come to accept that we were right. What a tragedy it is that so much violence and suffering filled the vacuum created by political inertia and inaction. Too many lives were lost and we know those lives cannot be brought back.

The SDLP has never swerved from our **total opposition to violence** of any kind. In the past year many of our elected representatives or members of their families from all across the North have suffered in the front line against sectarian violence. I want them all to know that this entire party stands with them as they take their courageous stand against sectarianism and bigotry.

We consistently assert our belief that violence is counter-productive and wrong. We are joined in our rejection of violence by the overwhelming majority of the people of Northern Ireland and beyond. That is one of the principle reasons why we are so opposed to the ongoing and sickening violence being perpetrated against small children in the Ardoyne.

We recognise the community problems that exist throughout North Belfast. However, those problems cannot in any way justify the appalling violence and intimidation being inflicted upon the children of Holy Cross Primary School. I reiterate now the stand taken by the SDLP since the beginning of this campaign of sectarianism. The protest must stop now. The only way to effectively address the needs and concerns of both communities is to engage in meaningful and constructive community-based dialogue. That is what the ordinary, decent people of North Belfast - unionist and nationalist alike - want to see happen.

Indeed, we have consistently drawn inspiration from the ordinary people of Northern Ireland, whose courage proved that the human spirit could triumph over human frailty. As I said in my Nobel peace prize speech:

“Amid shattered lives, a quiet heroism has borne silent rebuke to the evil that violence represents, to the carnage and waste of violence, to its utter futility.”

What we can do now, what we must do, is ensure that no more lives will be lost, that our young people can grow up in a society that is free and democratic and economically prosperous. That is our job for the years ahead. **To fulfil the untold promise of the Good Friday Agreement and build the new Ireland.**

Indeed, there is a broader imperative at this time of uncertainty for the world. The full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement can provide the world with a blueprint for conflict resolution. Good people around the world need to know that conflict can be ended and that peace, hope and justice can prevail. Equally, those who are intent on perpetrating acts of evil upon the world need to know that their deeds cannot and will not break the human spirit.

I have always maintained that at the centre of all conflict is difference, whether that is in terms of nationality, race or religion. The answer to difference, therefore, is to respect it, not to fight about it. Difference is a positive and healthy thing. It should be a source of strength. It should never be a source of hatred or division. And most of all difference should never be used to justify the use of violence.

The tragic events of 11th September impacted upon the entire world. The terrorist attacks on New York and Washington were truly catastrophic. On behalf of the SDLP I want to extend our condolences to President Bush and to

the American people as they seek to move forward in these most difficult of circumstances.

The United States of America is built upon the principles of liberty and freedom and democracy and justice. **It is absolutely right that in the defence of those principles the US should seek to bring those responsible to justice, but they must do so without causing suffering among innocent people.** It is essential that those same principles, by which the American people live, are now afforded to the people of Afghanistan.

The humanitarian situation in Afghanistan is simply staggering. Life expectancy there is only forty- five years. Sixty four per cent of all Afghans are illiterate. Eighty five per cent of women cannot read. Seventy per cent of the population is undernourished. Less than one third of Afghan children are enrolled to go to school and, of course, in Afghanistan girls are barred from attending school at all. In the past twenty-two years of war, one million people have died. There are six million refugees. Tonight in Afghanistan, the temperature may fall as low as minus twenty-five degrees

In simple terms, Afghanistan is a humanitarian disaster zone. The US and its allies are right to try to bring the Taliban regime and its allies to justice. But even more, the present humanitarian situation also makes the strong demand that every effort be made by those of us in the world who cherish freedom to ensure that the necessary aid is given immediately to the innocent people of Afghanistan at this time and for the future.

The civil rights movement, inspired by the great example of my hero, Martin Luther King Jr., had at the very core of its philosophy total opposition to violence. It is a principle that has guided our party throughout the past thirty years and more. It is a rock solid principle that the SDLP must renew time and again. The danger is that an 'an acceptable level of violence' mentality will creep into the thinking of our community. It is a danger that must be removed. There is no such thing as an acceptable level of violence in society. Moreover, we must never settle for an 'imperfect peace'. Our goal now and for the future must be the development of a peace that allows people to live free both from the threat of violence and from the reality of violence. True and lasting peace can be achieved. It is not yet a reality. It will require the SDLP to continue to stand up for the ideals of non-violence, peace and justice. It is something I know we will continue to do. **It is a goal that is worth standing up for.**

When the SDLP was established in August 1970, we were clear in our objectives. I recently found a number of old press releases carried in the Derry Journal in advance of my first election in early 1969, in which I made the following statements outlining my objectives for a new political party in Northern Ireland:

"The only way out of the present mess is for the people to speak out and give a clear mandate for a new approach- an approach based on the hard reality

that the basic problems of the people, unemployment, housing and emigration, should have priority of attention... The choice... is clear- status quo or the hope of a healthy, young and vigorous new movement.

“I will work for the formation of a new political movement based on social democratic principles, with open membership and an elected executive to allow complete involvement of the people in the process of decision-making.

“The movement must be completely non-sectarian and must root out a fundamental evil in our society- sectarian division.

“The movement must be committed to the ideal that the future of Northern Ireland should be decided by its people, and no change in its constitution accepted, except by the consent of its people.”

Those were the values that informed the foundation of our party. Since our formation, the SDLP has been tireless in the pursuit of our vision for a new Ireland. So much has changed since August 1970, when we first set out that new vision for Ireland. But just as important as having the vision, the SDLP had the strategy to deliver as well.

Naturally, those of us in positions of leadership could never have sustained our strategy were it not for the unflinching support both from within the party itself and from the electorate, who constantly stood shoulder to shoulder with us. We appreciated that the people had vested their faith in us and because of that we had to keep going because we knew that in the end our ideas would prevail. And in the end, **the SDLP delivered.**

With consistency and tenacity, the SDLP promoted the idea of comprehensive negotiations embracing all of the core relationships in these islands. We argued strongly- against a background of intolerance and opposition- that those negotiations needed to involve all democratically elected representatives whose organisations had left conflict behind and had committed to peace. The SDLP promoted the need for agreement, consensus and partnership. The SDLP delivered.

Furthermore, we were the architects of the ‘three sets of relationships’ concept that is now at the very epicentre of the Good Friday Agreement. We always stated that given that at the core of our problems were the divisions between and among the peoples of these islands, then only through the creation of institutions that recognised that diversity and respected those differences could politics be made work. We promoted that idea against a background of opposition and intransigence. But the people who were once so fundamentally opposed to any such institutions are now centrally involved in making those institutions work through the Agreement. Again, the SDLP delivered.

And we also understood the importance of leaving the last word with any agreement reached among the parties with the people of Ireland, North and

South. The referendum of May 22nd 1998 represented the first time since 1918 that the people of Ireland had spoken as to how they wanted to be governed. The people of Ireland gave a huge endorsement to the Good Friday Agreement, and in so doing embraced fully the politics of partnership and equality. Again, the SDLP delivered.

We all have been privileged in this long and difficult process to have the help of our friends in America. Most recently we are grateful to President Bush for the extremely effective encouragement his administration gave to the parties here to restart the political process.

It has been my privilege to know and work with many great political leaders in Washington; there are four in particular without whom it is unlikely we would have peace today. First, Senator Edward Kennedy, who from the very beginning worked for peace and justice and stayed with us, day in, day out, throughout the worst and the best days of this long journey.

Second, Speaker Thomas P. O'Neill, the man with the biggest heart I have ever met, who was powerfully committed to peace in Northern Ireland. He was instrumental in encouraging the two governments in working together and setting up the International Fund for Ireland.

Third, President Bill Clinton, who reached out more effectively than anyone to both sides of this community, and who played a fundamental role in securing the Agreement.

And, of course, Senator George Mitchell deservedly has achieved the status of a hero of the peace process with all sides, and history will disclose that his role was even more effective than has hitherto been reported.

I want to pay tribute as well today to General John DeChastelain, whose patience and expertise have been invaluable as we sought to achieve decommissioning.

Tony Blair took up the challenge of peace and has been an indefatigable partner through thick and thin. Successive Taoisigh poured their hearts and souls in the search for peace and reconciliation. Stepping stones to peace were laid by Charles Haughey, Garret Fitzgerald and John Bruton. Albert Reynolds played a crucial role using all his skills to bring heads and hearts together in London and Belfast when our chances of success seemed to turn on the thinnest of edges. And we have relied again and again upon the boundless energy, ingenuity and patience of the Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern.

Collectively, we have worked tirelessly towards the objective of lasting peace and justice in our community. And we have been joined in our endeavour by the overwhelming majority of the people of Ireland.

Indeed, anyone who calls himself or herself a republican and yet works against the wishes of the people of Ireland is doing a grave disservice to the

ideals of Wolfe Tone. **The true republican dream** of uniting Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter **will be best served** at the beginning of the twenty-first century **by** building upon the foundations of the **Good Friday Agreement**.

Yes, we in the SDLP knew that the road we chose to walk would be fraught with trial and difficulty. But we also knew that it was the only road we could travel. There were many, many dark moments. But we never lost hope.

In November 1993, during one of Northern Ireland's darkest hours, I received a number of letters from school children from the Greysteel area of Co. Derry. The messages were profound in their simplicity. The deep desire on the part of those children was for peace, for an end to murder and for a better future. For example, one little girl from Eglinton, whose name is Tracey, wrote:

"I write this letter for peace in Northern Ireland because I know a man called John Burns who died in the Rising Sun. He lives very near me and every night I can't go to bed without thinking about him. Mum says the old times were good. I thought not but now I wish I were in the old times. I am not begging or ordering, but asking for peace."

Those children from Greysteel are like so many other children across Northern Ireland. They have grown up under the dark shadow of violence. But they have also seen the potential of peace and agreement. The challenge now is to make sure those children grow up in real peace so that they can fulfil their ambitions and dreams in a society that is **free from violence, free from sectarianism and free from hatred**. Their generation must be allowed to live in an Ireland that is truly theirs, **an Ireland in which violence is a thing of the past and opportunity is a priority for the future**.

We in the SDLP have all played our part in bringing Ireland to the dawn of a new day where hope, justice and opportunity will replace hatred, division and despair. We should be proud today of all we have achieved as a party for our people, though we must not lose sight of the fact that we have a huge distance left to travel.

Together we have pushed the rock of our ideals up the steep slope of injustice and political sterility. But if we have learned one thing it is that there are always more steep slopes to be surmounted. Yet I cannot help but feel that optimism is overtaking doubt and that for the first time in a long time a new sense is growing that this is an irreversible road upon which we are embarked.

The IRA initiative to put weapons beyond use to the satisfaction of the DeChastelain Commission is very welcome. It represents a massive step forward for the republican movement and has given the political process a new dynamic. No one should underestimate the magnitude of the IRA decision.

That said, no one should lose sight of the fact that the SDLP has consistently demanded that decommissioning begin. Frequently when we made that demand for decommissioning some in the republican movement criticised us for playing into the hands of unionists. Equally, when we said we thought decommissioning should happen we were criticised by some unionists who believed it would never happen.

As has so often been the case throughout the political process, the SDLP never budged on this issue. Others eventually came to endorse our view having previously tried to undermine it.

The very same thing, I am certain, is happening in relation to policing. With conviction and consistency the SDLP has promoted the need for **a brand new beginning for policing** in the North on the basis of the Patten recommendations. One year ago I said that the opportunity for a new beginning to policing could be grasped, when I said:

“The best way to establish basic law and order will be through a new Police Service, one which fully meets the standards set for it in the Good Friday Agreement and as developed in the Patten report. Such a service will be one which is representative of and supported by both communities, which is properly accountable and which adheres to the highest and most professional standards.”

The SDLP was not found wanting when it came to meeting our responsibilities. We have worked hard for thirty years to achieve that new beginning. Indeed I want to pay tribute once again to Seamus Mallon for the committed and tenacious work he has done over many years in helping deliver the new Police Service of Northern Ireland.

We realised that the opportunity to create that new beginning for policing in keeping with the Patten recommendations was available. That is why we decided to nominate to the Police Board. We took a courageous step forward and I believe that step has received widespread support from the whole community. I want to encourage young people from all sections of the community to join the new police service. I can assure any young person who is considering joining the new police service that the SDLP will protect their basic human right to opt into policing as an honourable career choice.

I am delighted to say that the Police Board met for the first time earlier this week. Our agenda within the Police Board- represented capably by Eddie McGrady, Alex Attwood and Joe Byrne- is a positive and constructive one. We are ready to embrace the new opportunity and we are determined to make policing work for all the people of Northern Ireland. I encourage others to take a similar approach to ours. This is a wonderful chance to create a police service for the whole community in Northern Ireland. It must be grasped and it must be grasped now.

The institutions of the Good Friday Agreement, for so long under terrible pressure, have proven that they are more robust and durable than many might have envisaged. This week's election of David Trimble and Mark Durkan as First and Deputy First Minister is a very positive development. The Executive, North- South Ministerial Council and the British- Irish Council can now **get on with the job of real politics**. Recent developments illustrate to me that people at grassroots level - even those who support the DUP - are committed to making the Good Friday Agreement work. They value its potential, as do we. Like us, I am sure that unionism is committed to power-sharing as the only sustainable way forward for the North and for the island as a whole.

To those unionists who remain opposed to the Agreement, I say this. I understand that you have real and legitimate concerns surrounding the future course and shape of the political process. But I implore you to participate fully in shaping that future with the rest of us. Central to the Good Friday Agreement is the principle of consent, a fundamental principle of unionism. The SDLP has always endorsed the principle of consent. We will continue to do so. Anti-Agreement unionists must understand that if they are successful in bringing the Agreement down they will actually undermine one of the core principles of their own ideology. **I call today on anti-Agreement unionists to work with all of us, for the good of all.**

Yes, we will disagree on many issues. But there is also so much around which we can agree. **We can work the common ground well together**, addressing the social and economic concerns that face all the people and communities we represent collectively. Poverty grips parts of Derry in the same way that it grips parts of East Belfast. Unemployment remains a serious problem both in nationalist and in unionist areas. And it is only through the collective endeavour of all representatives that we will ever truly remedy the social and economic ails that affect our entire society.

We should all be very proud of the way in which the SDLP ministerial team has been performing in the Executive, in the North-South Ministerial Council and in the British- Irish Council. The SDLP is leading government, mapping out the way for positive politics and making a real impact on the lives of the people we serve. The social democratic values espoused by our party are now firmly at the centre of government. All our ministers are doing a first class job.

Tomorrow a new team will be handed the job of leading the SDLP. I have every confidence in that new leadership. **Mark Durkan is** a politician of outstanding ability. He is the **most gifted political** figure of the new, **young generation**. He has the calibre, the integrity and the vision to lead this party into the twenty-first century.

Equally, I am certain that whomever is elected deputy leader will serve the party with distinction and commitment. While each candidate has their own

distinct talents and abilities, all of them possess common qualities, not least a deep commitment to the SDLP that should give us all hope for the future.

This is indeed **a time of great change for the SDLP**. There are many challenges ahead and I want to outline a number of those key challenges today.

This party needs to take hold of the potential of its **young membership**. Look around this room and you will see evidence that the SDLP is in a very strong position for the future. Every year, the numbers of young people attending our conference is growing and this is a healthy sign for the future. But more important than numbers, it is the abilities possessed by those young people that is so impressive.

Our young members are enthusiastic. They are **talented** and **capable**. They are committed, **articulate** and **strong-willed**. They want to play their part in the future of politics on this island and we must encourage them to do so in every possible way. We owe it to our young membership, indeed we owe it to ourselves as a political party that is determined to keep growing, to ensure they are given every opportunity to achieve their ambitions within the SDLP and for their communities. I am certain that they have what it takes to meet the challenges coming their way.

Similarly, we need **more women at every level of the party**. In this year's elections the SDLP fielded more women candidates than any other political party in the North. We did so not as a token gesture but because those women were the best candidates in each case. That said, the number of women contesting the elections on behalf of our party was considerably less in proportionate terms than the number of women members of our party. It was also substantially less than the proportionate male to female ratio in the broader population. It is imperative that the SDLP, a party that promotes genuine equality at all levels of society, lives up to the same standards we promote. Women and men are equal. We must continue to demand that women and men enjoy equal opportunity. That is the standard the SDLP must set. Again, **we must lead the way**.

In real terms, it is the SDLP that has lead and others have followed. Now we must continue to lead the people towards our vision for Ireland in the twenty-first century. I want to see an Ireland in which all people can fulfil their potential irrespective of their background. We must focus now on the real issues facing our society - education, housing, healthcare, unemployment, infrastructure and all the other important issues facing us.

The SDLP has to keep making a positive impact on every aspect of Irish society. We have the policies that when delivered will make a real and meaningful difference to the lives of our people and today we renew our commitment to delivering them.

I want to play my part in creating **an Ireland agreed in purpose** and determined to build for the future, where tolerance, inclusion and mutual respect are the benchmarks of our society. Ireland can become a great place to live and to grow. We are duty bound to make sure it does.

I want to live in an Ireland mature enough to embrace racial, political and cultural diversity and strong enough to reject unequivocally the scourge of racism, hatred and narrow-mindedness that is tragically becoming endemic. **I cannot state my opposition to racism and bigotry strongly enough.**

Ireland in this century will be multi-cultural and dynamic. In Northern Ireland we have created a framework for developing the potential of diversity that can be applied to the island as a whole. I want to live in an Ireland which is caring, an Ireland that takes care of the most vulnerable and most weak in its society. **I want to live in an Ireland in which children are safe and free and happy.** I want to live in a free Ireland.

I want to live in an Ireland in which tackling poverty is our first and last priority. Let me ask you: Is it right that any person in our society should be allowed to live in poverty? Of course not. Is it right that anyone should be homeless? Of course not. Is it right that children should go hungry? Of course not. Yet, these are all realities facing Irish society today. These are the challenges facing us- the challenges of real politics, of tackling the social and economic needs of the people. These are our challenges and our responsibilities.

I want to live in an Ireland that is at work, where our young people can participate in the highest possible standards of training and education, get decent jobs and live in the land of their birth. The tide of emigration may have turned over the past ten years, but the imperative now is to create a rising tide of prosperity and opportunity that will lift our communities out of disadvantage and into employment, that will breathe new life into our cities, our towns and our rural areas.

As I have so often said, our young people are our best resource as well as our best hope for the future. We must offer our young people the best possible training, we must provide them with the educational facilities and opportunities they need, we must ensure they can live in quality housing.

In short, we must provide our young people with **a beacon of hope and opportunity** for the new agreed Ireland and, of course, remove the real borders in Ireland which is not a line on a map but in the hearts and minds of people; and given that it is based on distrust and prejudice we will erode that distrust by working together and the new Ireland will evolve based on mutual respect and agreement among Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter.

And so it is with high hopes that I finish now. In the words of my great friend, Senator Edward Kennedy, who has been a constant ally of the peace process in Ireland:

“There were hard hours on our journey, and often we sailed against the wind. But always we kept our rudder true, and there were so many of you who stayed the course and shared our hope. You gave your help; but even more, you gave your hearts.”

I thank **you for your unrelenting support** in the bad days and in the good. Your work at grassroots level was vital as we sought to design and develop the new Ireland. With renewed energy and vigour, your work will continue to be vital in the months and years ahead as the new SDLP leadership begins its work. Often, we have sailed against the wind but always we have kept our rudder true. And we always will steer the course of hope and opportunity, of what we believe to be right, no matter how difficult that course may be.
Leading the community. Shaping the country. The SDLP.

In the words of Louis MacNeice:

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

Keep believing. Keep working. Keep hoping. Keep striving. Keep building. The New Agreed Ireland of our dreams is within reach. One day:

“We shall overcome”.