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Relations with the North

Suggested opening statement by Taoiseach:

As you are aware, Prime Minister, it has been for some time the policy of the Irish Government to offer the maximum possible measure of co-operation with the Northern Government in practical matters of public concern for the mutual advantage of people living in both parts of Ireland. Substantial progress has already been made in this direction in a number of fields. Apart from the practical benefits to both parts of Ireland which may flow from this co-operation, it is our hope that it will also help to remove the barriers of suspicion, mistrust and animosity which have divided Irishmen in the past. I would, of course, be less than frank if I did not tell you that the re-unification of the country by peaceful means remains, and will always be, our ultimate aspiration.

Pending that happy eventuality there are, however, matters within the existing constitutional framework of Northern Ireland which give us cause for serious concern. I refer, of course, to the discriminatory practices in such matters as the franchise, housing and employment which are generally recognised by all fair-minded people to exist in Northern Ireland and to have existed there since 1922. These practices deprive the minority of the rights and benefits which they have a right to expect and contribute largely to the bitterness and strife which have existed in that part of Ireland.

I am encouraged to believe, Prime Minister, that you are conscious of the fact that all is not well in Northern Ireland and that you would like to see reform. My purpose in raising this matter with you is to urge you to do everything in your power to remedy this situation both ⁱⁿ ~~by~~ electoral reform and elimination of all forms of discrimination against the minority which even the Government of Ireland Act, 1920,

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purported to avoid.

I am aware that the Queen's Speech on the opening of the Stormont Parliament last week contained limited proposals for electoral reform to be implemented over a long term. While any improvement is welcome, we are disappointed that these limited proposals do not go very far. The speech is a disappointment for those who hoped for concrete proposals for radical reforms leading to the adoption of the one-man - one-vote principle in all Northern elections. The absence of this principle in the Local-Government franchise, in particular, is what makes possible many of the discriminatory practices, especially in housing. Anything that can be done to secure justice and equitable treatment for all sections of the population in Northern Ireland is bound to contribute to peace and harmony in that area and between our two countries.