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GENTLEMEN MAY I OPEN THIS CONFERENCE BY WELCOMING HERE THE TAOISEACH AND HIS COLLEAGUES AND THE MEMBERS OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND EXECUTIVE DESIGNATE AND THEIR COLLEAGUES.

THIS IS AN HISTORIC OCCASION. REPRESENTATIVES OF THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND AND OF THOSE WHO WILL SOON, WE HOPE, TAKE ON THE GOVERNMENT OF NORTHERN IRELAND OVER A WIDE RANGE OF FUNCTIONS, ARE SITTING DOWN TOGETHER WITH THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM TO CONSIDER QUESTIONS VITAL TO THE FUTURE OF IRELAND.

WE ALL MEET IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF A SAD HISTORY OF VIOLENCE IN NORTHERN IRELAND AND IN THE FACT OF THREATS OF FURTHER VIOLENCE. IN MY JUDGMENT, IT LARGELY DEPENDS UPON OUR ACHIEVEMENTS WHETHER THAT TREAT BECOMES A REALITY.

I HAVE NO DOUBT THAT IT IS IN THE HANDS OF ALL OF US HERE TODAY TO BRING ABOUT A GREAT GOOD THE FUTURE PEACE AND STABILITY OF NORTHERN IRELAND.

BUT WE SHALL NOT ONLY BE TALKING ABOUT NORTHERN IRELAND. WHAT WE SAY AND WHAT WE DO WILL EFFECT THE INTERESTS OF THE UNITED KINGDOM AND IRELAND AS A WHOLE.

THE WHITE PAPER ON NORTHERN IRELAND CONSTITUTIONAL PROPOSALS WHICH WAS PUBLISHED IN MARCH 1973 FOLLOWING EXTENSIVE CONSULTATIONS ON THE EARLIER PAPER FOR DISCUSSION, CONTAINED THE PROPOSAL THAT THERE SHOULD BE A CONFERENCE TO DISCUSS THREE INTER-RELATED OBJECTIVES.

THESE THREE WERE THE ACCEPTANCE OF THE PRESENT STATUS OF NORTHERN IRELAND AND OF THE POSSIBILITY — WHICH WOULD HAVE TO BE COMPATIBLE WITH THE PRINCIPLE OF CONSENT — OF SUBSEQUENT CHANGES IN THAT STATUS; EFFECTIVE CONSULTATION AND CO-OPERATION IN IRELAND FOR THE BENEFIT OF NORTH AND SOUTH ALIKE; AND THE PROVISION OF A FIRM BASIS FOR CONCERNTED GOVERNMENTAL AND COMMUNITY ACTION AGAINST TERRORIST ORGANISATIONS.

SINCE THEN, MUCH HAS HAPPENED AND THE NATURE OF THE ISSUES HAVE BECOME, IN SOME RESPECTS AT LEAST, CLEARER.

THIS IS NOT, AS WE SEE IT, A CONFERENCE WITH AN AGREED AGENDA OR AN AGREED PROGRAMME OF WORK. WE THOUGHT IT RIGHT THAT THE CONFERENCE ITSELF SHOULD DECIDE HOW IT GOES ABOUT ITS BUSINESS AND THAT THE PARTIES WHO WILL FORM A NORTHERN IRELAND EXECUTIVE SHOULD THEMSELVES HAVE A SAY IN THIS.
WE ARE ALL HERE CONCERNED WITH A "PACKAGE". DURING THE TALKS WHICH THE FORMER SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND HELD OVER THE LAST TWO MONTHS WITH THE NORTHERN IRELAND PARTIES, IT WAS ACCEPTED THAT THERE SHOULD BE AGREEMENT ON ALL THE MAJOR ISSUES BEFORE THE PARTIES CAME TOGETHER IN AN EXECUTIVE.

THIS CONFERENCE WILL ITSELF NO DOUBT WISH TO LOOK AT MANY OF THESE ISSUES. I HOPE THAT WE CAN REACH CONCLUSIONS ON THE POINTS OF IMPORTANCE IN A WAY WHICH WE CAN ALL ACCEPT. THESE CONCLUSIONS CAN THEN BE ANNOUNCED AT THE END OF THE CONFERENCE. BUT THE DISCUSSION OF A "PACKAGE" CANNOT EASILY BE FITTED INTO A FORMAL AGENDA.

PERHAPS I MIGHT FIRST OF ALL REHEARS WHERE WE HAVE GOT TO.

THE FACT THAT WE ARE HERE AT ALL IS A TESTIMONY TO THE WORK OF MR WHITELAW WHO HAVE RECENTLY GIVEN UP HIS RESPONSIBILITIES AS SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND.

SINCE MARCH 1972 WHEN WE ASSUMED DIRECT RULE, HE, BEGAN AND CARRIED ON A SERIES OF DIALOGUES WITH THE POLITICAL PARTIES IN NORTHERN IRELAND. THIS MADE IT POSSIBLE FOR US TO PUBLISH A GREEN PAPER AND THEN A WHITE PAPER WHICH SET OUT OUR PROPOSALS.

NOT EVERYONE AGREED WITH THOSE PROPOSALS BUT IT IS FAIR TO SAY THAT THE NORTHERN IRELAND CONSTITUTION ACT 1973 REPRESENTED A GREAT DEAL OF AGREEMENT IN NORTHERN IRELAND ON BASES ISSUES. IT WAS WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THIS ACT THAT THE INTENSIVE CONSULTATIONS WERE UNDERTAKEN IN NORTHERN IRELAND BY MR WHITELAW WITH THE ALLIANCE PARTY, THE SDLP AND THE ULSTER UNIONIST PARTY.

THESE DISCUSSIONS WERE BROUGHT TO A SUCCESSFUL CONCLUSION AND THE AGREEMENTS REACHED WERE ANNOUNCED BY MR WHITELAW DURING THE DEBATE IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS ON 22 NOVEMBER 1973. I AM SURE THAT EVERYONE HERE WILL BE FAMILIAR WITH WHAT HE THEN SAID.

"THE WAY WAS OPEN FOR THE FORMAL APPOINTMENT OF A NORTHERN IRELAND EXECUTIVE AND FOR THE DEVOLUTION OF POWERS THAT EXECUTIVE AND TO THE NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY. IT WAS HOWEVER AGREED THAT ONCE SUCH AGREEMENT HAD BEEN REACHED THERE SHOULD BE THIS CONFERENCE TO DISCUSS A COUNCIL OF IRELAND AND OTHER MATTERS. THIS IS WHY WE ARE HERE TODAY.

THERE ARE A VARIETY OF INTER-RELATED SUBJECTS WHICH WE WILL BE TO EXAMINE.

FOR EXAMPLE WE WELCOME AN OPPORTUNITY TO DISCUSS THE STRUCTURE COUNCIL OF IRELAND. ON THIS WE HAVE ALREADY MADE KNOWN IN PROPOSITIONS WHICH WE ARE PREPARED TO DISCUSS TODAY.
We think that in order that decisions of the Council carry the greatest possible degree of support, they should be taken at governmental level on a basis of unanimity. No all of you here today will wish to express your views on aand other propositions on the structure of a Council.

In the related question of law and order generally, the security situation is important in this context and her Majesty's Government has reaffirmed its firm commitment to bring to an end for all sections of the community as the security situation permits. As an earnest of this, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland hopes to be able to bring into use his statutory powers of selective release in time for a number of detainees to be released before Christmas.

As to the security situation, HMG has stated that is aim to achieve the end of politically motivated violence in whatever source. We are in no doubt that a Council in Ireland can play a useful role in relation to this and we shall be glad to consider further imaginative and important concept of a common law area, the question of extradition processes and what role the Council might play in the law and order field. HMG are in no doubt that the threat of terrorism must be dealt with on an All-Ireland basis if effective steps are to be taken.

I am sure there will be discussion on policing. We are prepared to engage in this provided that it is understood that the Royal Ulster Constabulary must continue to provide the police service for Northern Ireland.

These then are some of the matters for us to discuss, together with the vital issue of the territorial status of Northern Ireland. We do so in a developing situation.

In Northern Ireland we are in the process of change. The Institution Act provides the means to make advances in the field of human rights: the Royal Ulster Constabulary is being substantially reorganised and developed. There is an extensive programme of economic reform being brought about. We have to acknowledge and take account of this in our discussions.
But there is no reason why new organisations or structures, such as a Council of Ireland, should not be created which, far from impeding these far-reaching developments, will assist them.

At the end of our conference, it is HMG's hope that we can reach conclusions on all points under discussion and include them in a communiqué from this conference. This can lead to the formal appointment of a Northern Ireland Executive and the devolution of powers to it. There will follow a formal conference at which they two sovereign governments and the Northern Ireland Executive can ratify the agreements which have been reached.

Further, it is our hope that this conference will decide upon a programme of work, which, given determination both there and in Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland, can bring about great changes, an end to politically motivated violence and the beginning of stable political institutions in Northern Ireland.

As politicians, all of us here will have the task of explaining to those we represent the various elements of this 'package'. Not all of it will be universally welcomed but we shall all have to make compromises for the common good.

This conference can be an end and a beginning. It is the end of the period of discussion both in Great Britain and Northern Ireland on the way to make constitutional advances in Northern Ireland compatible with the devolution of government. It can also be a beginning to new institutions not only in Northern Ireland but also in Ireland as a whole. Such institutions will, we must all hope, pave the way for peace, stability and harmonious co-operation throughout Ireland.

I expect the Tánaiste may now wish to make some opening remarks. I have kept my remarks as short as possible so that by lunch today we can all have made our opening statements. It may then be desirable for the two sovereign governments and the leaders of the parties to meet to decide how we conduct our future business.