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Draft address by Minister for Foreign Affairs to St. Patrick's
Society and New York Emerald Societies, October 1

Mr. Chairman, Reverend Fathers, Ladies and Gentlemen:

This is my first visit to the United States as Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Government of Ireland and I am honoured and delighted to have an opportunity to address such a distinguished gathering of Irish-Americans on my Government's behalf.

The St. Patrick's Society is the oldest Irish charitable society in the New York area and it has over many years brought comfort and relief to many in distress in this great city, and at the same time, has brought honor to the name of the Irish community in Brooklyn and throughout the metropolitan area. "ar scath a cheile 'sea mhaireann na daoine" - "people survive through depending on each other" - is an old Irish principle of charity and welfare exemplified by this great Society and its distinguished president, Mr. Jim Moriarty.

The strength and variety of the emerald societies in the New York area and indeed throughout the United States, underline the outstanding role the Irish in America have played and continue to play in dealing with the problems of administering the great cities of this country. New York city is fortunate in having the services of those who make up the emerald societies with your distinguished presidents

My first purpose here today is to bring you and the Irish-American community at large warm greetings from my Government and people and to assure you that my Government places a high priority on maintaining and developing the relations based on blood, common heritage and friendship which we have always enjoyed with you.

We are a small country with a population much smaller than that of New York but we are proud to play our role as a sovereign State in the world. In doing so we know we have the support not only of our own population but also of the many millions of Irish descent around the world and, in an especially intimate way, the Irish in America. When we needed it we never hesitated to look to you for support and of course you never have let us down. In another sense we feel that you in a way represent us in America and your success in American life and the recognition that your contributions to your community has been accorded have given us enormous encouragement over several generations in our struggle for freedom and our efforts to establish a modern, just and prosperous community. "If we could do it in America, we can do it in Ireland" was a saying that summed up for many Irish people the reason for their confidence about their own future. That remains true and valid today.

Irish emigration to the United States has as you all know dwindled to a trickle in recent years but this is due in large measure to our success in keeping our people at home. The United States has contributed significantly to our success in reducing emigration from Ireland through continued American

support for our tourist industry, our exports and our programme of investment by foreign industry in Ireland. But I want to emphasise that the end of emigration has not in any way diminished our warm regard for you the Irish-American community or our commitment to maintain close contact and good relations with you. We welcome your visits to Ireland and your interest in our affairs. While we must ourselves take the final decisions on our problems, we welcome your concern and your advice. During my present visit I intend to have meetings with a number of representatives of the principal Irish-American organisations precisely for the purpose of hearing their views and in turn giving them an impression of how we in Ireland see our problems today.

Earlier this year we were greatly encouraged to see some of the principal figures in American national political life, themselves of Irish descent, coming together to give a lead to American and particularly Irish-American opinion on the tragic problem of Northern Ireland and here I would like to pay tribute on behalf of my fellow-countrymen to Speaker O'Neill, Senators Kennedy and Moynihan and the Governor of this great State, The Honorable Hugh Carey. Irishmen of all traditions heard their appeal for an end to violence and for support for negotiations and were encouraged by it. We were encouraged again by the statement of President Carter of August 30 in which he called for a just solution to the problem of Northern Ireland which would involve both parts of the community there, would have the support of the Irish and British Governments, and would protect human rights and

guarantee freedom from discrimination. We welcomed his undertaking that in the event of such a settlement the American Government would be prepared to join with others to see how additional job-creating investment could be encouraged. My Government in a statement in response to the President's statement said: "President Carter's statement is a constructive development in American relations with Ireland and Britain and reflects the traditional generosity of the American Government and people and their interest in Ireland. The President has placed himself firmly on the side of very distinguished American leaders who, in the President's words, seek peace and reject violence."

"It is particularly useful to emphasise that the problems of Northern Ireland have many dimensions, of which any effective and realistic solution must take account. President Carter rightly underlines the importance of finding a just solution by peaceful means, which protects human rights, in which both parts of the community in Northern Ireland as well as the Irish and British Governments will be involved."

"The Irish Government also welcomes the renewed American commitment to continue vigorously to apprehend and prosecute those who violate U.S. law in the respect of supporting with financial or other aid organisations involved directly or indirectly in violence in Northern Ireland, irrespective of the political or religious sympathies of those involved."

"President Carter's statement is a welcome indication of the interest of the United States Government in Irish affairs. He has once again made clear the goodwill of the American people to a land for which many Americans have a special affection. He has offered to help. It is for the people of Ireland, North and South, together with the British and Irish Governments, to insure that his offer is transformed into political and economic progress."

We know that the responsible concern of many Irish Americans played an important part in these developments, We thank you for this concern.

Let me say a few words about my Government's position on Northern Ireland. It is a central aim of our policy, and one which, I believe, we share with many Irish Americans, to secure by peaceful means the unity and independence of Ireland as a democratic republic. It would be dishonest on our part to pretend that our hope was otherwise. At the same time, the tragic events of recent years have forced all of us in Ireland to recognise that, regardless of the political tradition to which we may belong - be it Nationalist or Unionist - a major part of the problem is rooted in distrust between Irish people of different traditions. We have all been forced to acknowledge that no real progress will be made without reconciliation, and that the greatest obstacle in the way of reconciliation is violence - the violence of the Irish Republican Army and of loyalist paramilitary assassins, and the discrimination and incidents of

brutality caused by certain elements in the security forces in the province. The Irish Government totally rejects the use of force towards achieving its aims and it unequivocally condemns violence, from whatever quarter such violence comes.

It is because we in Ireland see so clearly the importance of reconciliation that we were so heartened by the helpful interest of your President and other political leaders.

Over the years since the establishment of partition, a great deal of mistrust and ignorance has grown up in Northern Ireland vis-a-vis the South and in the South vis-a-vis the North. The tragic events of recent years have seen, in addition to violence and its tragic effects on the lives of ordinary innocent people, the extraordinary efforts of moderate political leaders in Northern Ireland, particularly those of the SDLP, despite threats to their lives from all sides and the repeated frustration of their hopes, to point the way towards a rational workable and just solution. The efforts of these men and women have forced Irish people of all traditions, North and South, to get to know each other a little better and I believe that many traditional fears, such as those of Northern Unionists that we in the South have violent designs on them, have diminished. Similarly their fears of the intentions of Irish-Americans have been reduced notably by the important developments that occurred during this year. The importance of removing fears of this kind, as a step towards a real improvement in the circumstances of both communities in Northern Ireland cannot be overemphasised.

The growth of trust and acquaintance and the decrease of fear and suspicion constitute an important and I believe, permanent contribution to creating much better conditions in which Irish people of different traditions can discuss their future destiny. As I have said, we in the Irish Government believe that the day will come when, however intractable the problems may now seem, Irish people of different views will hammer out just and definitive solutions.

For our part, we in the Irish Government have committed ourselves to creating a just and prosperous society in the South as will prove attractive to our fellow Irishmen of all traditions in the North. We attach particular importance to securing the civil rights of all Irish people North and South, and in our actions, both internationally and on the domestic front, we have tried to ensure that these rights are not infringed. We have emphasised that in negotiations on the future of our country we will be sensitive to the need and the desirability that all the traditions which are represented in our island should be, and be seen to be fully safeguarded. We believe that Irish men and women can, as they have demonstrated so resoundingly in the United States of America, rise above the past to the great challenges of the age with courage, resourcefulness and compassion.