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Statement issued on behalf of the Government,
29th July, 1982.

During recent days it has become apparent that efforts are being made on a number of fronts to paint as gloomy a picture as possible of the state of relations between the Irish and British governments. It is obvious that this is being done, not with any intention of improving such relations, nor with the hope of removing the root causes of any disagreement that may exist but rather for short-term political advantage. One can speculate on the short-term political reasons for such efforts but what is clear is that the objective of those involved has nothing to do with improving relations between the two countries. It is regrettable that the leader of the Fine Gael Party should associate himself with such efforts in a way that amounts to taking sides with Britain and attributing blame for any deterioration to the Irish Government.

This Government have always been fully conscious of the importance and desirability of good relations between the British and Irish governments. It was this Government which initiated in 1980 a joint attempt with the British Government to achieve progress on the problem of Northern Ireland. It is worth quoting a section of the communique issued after the meeting between the Taoiseach and the British Prime Minister in December 1980:

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"The Taoiseach and the Prime Minister agreed that the economic, social and political interests of the peoples of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Republic are inextricably linked, but that the full development of these links has been put under strain by division and dissent in Northern Ireland. In that context, they accepted the need to bring forward policies and proposals to achieve peace, reconciliation and stability; and to improve relations between the peoples of the two countries."

In the light of this agreed statement and many other similar ones it is difficult to find any justification for the recent British claims that there was no commitment on the part of the UK Government to consult with the Irish Government on matters affecting Northern Ireland.

The British Government have insisted on putting forward proposals which have been rejected by practically all sectors of opinion in this country, North and South. Indeed Dr. FitzGerald himself is still unable to find anything positive to say about the initiative. He, like the Government, accepts the total failure of the legislation to make any provision for recognition of the Nationalist identity in Northern Ireland.

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This Government must record their regret that Britain has turned away from a course which undoubtedly contained the possibility for a long term solution to the situation in the Northern part of this island and, for reasons which are unclear, has taken an initiative almost certain to fail.

Despite Dr. FitzGerald's professed disappointment with the Prior initiative and the concern expressed by his Minister for Foreign Affairs on his behalf in February last, he now appears ready to support the unilateral initiative - something which neither the SDLP nor indeed any of the major Northern Ireland political parties are prepared to do.

Dr. FitzGerald's intention to put down a motion in Dail Éireann to establish a watered-down Anglo-Irish parliamentary tier at, it is understood, the suggestion of British Ministers is a matter of grave concern. It is an irresponsible intrusion into an area which is properly the responsibility of the Government of the day.

It was the Irish Government's view that the parliamentary tier should be set up by the two Governments. Dr. FitzGerald's agreement to leave this important step to the parliaments involved is to be deplored, and undermines the position of the Irish Government. If the parliamentary tier is not to be established by the two Governments as a forum for consultation

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on political and constitutional matters, then its role would be very limited and of little more value than a social club for parliamentarians.

Questions also need to be asked about the recent activities of Dr. FitzGerald in London, where he has met the British Secretary of State, Mr. Prior, without revealing to the Government or the public what was said at the meeting. If what Dr. FitzGerald told Mr. Prior was on the lines of what he told the Duke of Norfolk at the House of Lords, then the activities of the Opposition Leader must become a cause of concern not merely to the Irish Government but to the entire Nationalist community in Ireland, whose well-founded opposition to the Prior proposals is being undermined by him.

In the House of Lords on 8 July 1982 the Duke of Norfolk said of the Bill and the White Paper after meeting Dr. FitzGerald: "Everything in this Bill has, so to speak, Dr. Garret FitzGerald's approval. Anyhow, it is a continuation of his thoughts. He sees this Bill as being a wonderful step forward."

Dr. FitzGerald has not denied these remarks.