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The United States and the problem of Northern Ireland

The United States has demonstrated considerable interest in the problem of Northern Ireland, reflecting the close ties between Ireland and the U.S. and the concern of the some 40 million Americans of Irish ancestry. The strong interest taken by U.S. political leaders, including President Reagan, in the problem is evident from the following:

".....the people of Northern Ireland should know that they have our complete support in their quest for a peaceful and just society in the event of a settlement, the U.S. Government would be prepared to join with others to see how additional job-creating investment could be encouraged to the benefit of all the people of Northern Ireland"

- Statement by President Jimmy Carter, 30 August 1977

"We believe a lasting solution can be found only in a process of reconciliation between the two Irish political traditions and between Britain and Ireland. The United States welcomes the efforts of the Irish and British Governments in widening the framework of their co-operation to this end".

- Letter to the Taoiseach (Irish Prime Minister) Dr. Garret FitzGerald T.D. from President Ronald Reagan, 1 December 1981.

"We are especially heartened by your own efforts, as well your colleagues in the New Ireland Forum and the British Government, to seek a democratic and peaceful reconciliation of Ireland's diverse traditions..... For our part, we shall continue to encourage American firms to invest in Ireland, North and South, in ways which promote prosperity for both traditions".

- President Ronald Reagan addressing the Taoiseach, Dr. Garret FitzGerald T.D. at a White House luncheon, 16 March, 1984.

In Congress the concern of American politicians about Northern Ireland led to the formation of the influential and bipartisan Friends of Ireland Organisation in 1981. Those U.S. legislators who have joined this body share the goal of Irish unity but agree that it can only be reached with the consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland. They have developed a fruitful relationship with a counterpart body in the Oireachtas (Irish Parliament), the Irish-United States Parliamentary Group. This year's St. Patrick's Day message from the Friends of Ireland was signed by 45 Senators and 65 members of the House of Representatives. The following is a selection of extracts from statements by the Friends of Ireland and two of their leading members, Speakers Thomas P. O'Neill Jr. and Senator Edward M. Kennedy, reacting to the publication of the New Ireland Forum on 2nd May 1984:

"We are greatly encouraged by the Report of the New Ireland Forum and we strongly urge the British Government as well as all political leaders in Northern Ireland to review its findings and recommendations with an open mind and an open heart..... We regard the report as the first real breakthrough since the collapse of the Sunningdale Agreement in 1974 We look forward to President Reagan's visit to Ireland next month as an important and timely opportunity to advance the peace process begun so well by this remarkable Report".

- Friends of Ireland, 3 May, 1984

"The prospects for bringing peace and reconciliation to Northern Ireland have been enhanced significantly by the release of the Report of the New Ireland Forum..... Now it is up to the British Government and the Unionists to

consider this Report with open hearts and open minds. Permitting the status quo in Northern Ireland to continue is simply intolerable".

- Speaker Thomas P. O'Neill Jr., 2 May, 1984

"The Report of the New Ireland Forum..... is the most promising initiative toward peace in more than a decade of violence and conflict in Northern Ireland..... I hope that all sides to the conflict - in Dublin and London, in Derry and Belfast - will give this opportunity for peace a chance. And I also hope that President Reagan, in his visit to Ireland next month and in his talks with British and Irish leaders, will offer the full assistance of the United States in achieving this long-sought goal".

- Senator Edward M. Kennedy, 2 May, 1984