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NORTHERN IRELAND Information Service

27 March 1985

EXTRACT FROM SPEECH IN NEW YORK TODAY BY RT HON DOUGLAS HURD, MP,
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND.

The traditional argument about Northern Ireland is about partition and the border, about the union of Northern Ireland with Great Britain versus the ideal of Irish unity. Everyone knows the facts. The majority of people in Northern Ireland, just under a million, are Protestants and wish to preserve the union. Their forefathers came to Ireland, largely from Scotland, in the 17th Century - many at about the same time as the May Flower crossed the Atlantic. I do not need to tell Americans, that three hundred years is enough to establish an identity and an outlook. The minority, just over half a million, are Catholics who also have their own identity, their own beliefs. They too have an absolute right to live in Northern Ireland, and to be fully respected and accommodated there.

In a democratic system the view of the majority prevails, and the rights of the minority are protected. The British Government honours the principle of self-determination by making clear that the constitutional status of Northern Ireland - which is that Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom - shall not be changed unless the majority agree. No political party in Ireland, no one except the terrorists, now believes that Ireland could be united except with the consent of the majority in the North. As a result of wise and courageous thinking in the Republic, included in the Forum Report the argument has moved forward. Members of the minority in the North will continue to hope for the eventual unity of Ireland, just as members of the majority will continue to hold strongly to the union with Great Britain. But the real argument of today, the heart of the work in which I am engaged is now different. The question which all friends of Ireland now need to put to themselves is this - how for the foreseeable future can the institutions and policies of government in Northern

Ireland command the support and co-operation of majority and minority alike?

It is important to be clear why we need an answer to that question. It is not because if we found the answer we could talk to the terrorists and convert them into reasonable citizens. I am absolutely satisfied that no concession will satisfy them. What they aim at is not democracy in Ireland but tyranny in Ireland, imposed by bomb and bullet. They cannot accommodate the democratic systems in either North or South of Ireland, and we certainly have no intention of accommodating them.

The reason why we need political progress in addition to a robust security policy is straightforward. A healthy society is one in which all its citizens accept the validity of the institutions of the State, and in which many of the powers of government are devolved to locally elected representatives of the citizen. Where this is not so, extremism finds some support, and more acquiescence. In a society with normally functioning institutions support for extremism can more easily be turned to rejection.

Since the imposition of direct rule by Britain in 1972 we have made strides in overcoming the sense of grievance of the minority. Our safeguards are impressive. Discrimination on the grounds of sex and religious or political belief is against the law. The Equal Opportunities Commission, the Fair Employment Agency, the Commissioner for Complaints, the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights, the Housing Executive - all in their different ways and in their different spheres exist to safeguard and secure civil rights for everyone in Northern Ireland.

I defy anyone who sees our housing in Belfast to deny our commitment to both communities or our success. The slums are being replaced or rebuilt with some of the best housing in Europe. Now we are turning our attention to the city centre. As violence decreases and normality returns, the department stores are pushing up rents as they compete for space. Thirty new restaurants opened in Belfast in the last two years - think what that means in terms of people in both communities walking the same well-lit streets, enjoying again together the ordinary amenities of a big city of the Western

World.

I want to build on this progress by persuading the minority to take all the opportunities open to them for influencing policy in Northern Ireland. For example it would be admirable if they would take the seats to which they were elected in the Assembly, or if they would take all the seats offered in the Police Authority. There are other opportunities which exist or can be created. Of course there has to be negotiations and discussion, because the representatives of the minority need to be satisfied that the opportunities are genuine and carry real influence with them. The majority needs to be satisfied in turn that its rights are respected, and that the democratic distinction between a majority and a minority is not ignored. I hope that such negotiation and discussion can soon be under way.

The Catholic minority in Northern Ireland have strongly represented that the Government of the Republic must have an important role in the affairs of the North. I find it natural that Irish Ministers should hold and wish occasionally to express strong views on events in the North, and we should not be so thin-skinned that we cannot listen with open minds to the advice of candid friends. I am also convinced that a solid working relationship between North and South is in the interests of us both. The dialogue on these matters agreed at the Anglo-Irish Summit in November is continuing between the two Governments in a constructive spirit, and I certainly hope that we can bring it to a sound conclusion.

Perhaps people will say to me here, as they constantly say in England, that this is all a hopeless task, that the forces driving people apart in Northern Ireland are irresistible. Certainly if the only evidence were the tragedies imposed on Ireland by the terrorists, and immediately flashed on the television screens of the world - or if the only evidence were the shrill negative voices of some politicians - then that sombre conclusion would seem obvious. But I am exposed week by week to different evidence. My colleagues and I find an enormous longing for normality, for certainty, for reconciliation. The people who feel this in both communities are not always good at communicating it to those whom they elect. I am certainly not saying for certain that those individuals and groups now working for normality are bound to prevail, but they now have a reasonable chance. It is my job, and the job of every friend of Ireland, to make clear our total rejection of

violent solutions and to give a strong helping hand to those men and women who are trying to build this new partnership.