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REMARKS BY THE TAOISEACH, DR. GARRET FITZGERALD, T.D., ON
THE OCCASION OF THE SIGNING OF THE ANGLO-IRISH AGREEMENT

15 NOV 1985

Throughout these negotiations, the Irish Government's approach has been to seek ways of securing recognition of and respect for the rights and aspirations of both traditions in this island; a process which must of its nature contribute also to better relations between the peoples of Ireland and Britain.

A majority of Irish people share the aspiration to Irish unity to be achieved peacefully and by agreement. That is the nationalist position. It is obvious that the British Prime Minister and I have come to these negotiations with different historical perspectives and, as it were, with different title deeds. But we have been able to agree about what would and what would not happen in the future.

The Agreement affirms clearly that any change in the status of Northern Ireland would only come about with the consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland. The Agreement recognises that the present wish of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland is for no change. The Agreement goes on to say that if in the future a majority of the people of Northern Ireland clearly wish for and formally consent to the fulfilment of the nationalist aspiration, the two Governments will act to implement that wish. *By introducing subsidiary and subordinate legislation in their legislatures*

The Agreement thus makes provision for the nationalist aspiration to unity in the only conditions in which constitutional nationalists seek, or would accept, its fulfilment - without violence and with the consent of a majority in Northern Ireland.

The corollary of this is that the Northern Unionist community

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has for the first time a commitment in the form of an international agreement that a change in the status of Northern Ireland, such as would be involved in a move to Irish political unity, would not take place without the consent of a majority in Northern Ireland.

On the Irish side these negotiations were preceded by a process of consultation involving a review of traditional attitudes by the constitutional nationalist parties of the island, through the New Ireland Forum.

The Forum's Report provided the basis for the Irish Government's approach to this negotiation. The Agreement as it has now emerged is fully consistent with the principles proposed in Chapter 5 Paragraph 2 of that Report.

Tá sé mar chuspóir againn comh-aitheantas agus comh-urraim a bhaint amach don dá fhéiniúlacht i dTuaisceart Éireann. Féadfaigh Náisiúnaithe anois a gceann a ardú agus a fhios acu go bhfuil seasamh acu atá ar comhchéim leis an seasamh atá ag comhaltaí an phobail aontachtúil agus gur léir don saol go bhfuil an scéal amhlaidh.

As I have just said in Irish, our purpose is to secure equal recognition and respect for the two identities in Northern Ireland. Nationalists can now raise their heads knowing their position is, and is seen to be, on an equal footing with that of members of the unionist community.

As a result we will be creating conditions in which the nationalist community in the North, can more readily identify

with ^{the} structures of Government in a way that will help peace and stability to emerge in this island.

For the unionist community, who have suffered the most tragic and repulsive onslaught on their right to life and to well-being, this Agreement offers a way forward towards the restoration of normal life without violence or fear.

This Agreement thus involves no abandonment of nationalist aspirations, nor any threat to unionist rights; but it does offer a prospect of progress towards peace and justice for Northern nationalists, and of peace and stability for Northern unionists.

There are no victors: nor any losers. But if what has been agreed is implemented in full good faith, as I believe ^{and know} it will be, all of the people of Northern Ireland will gain. So indeed will the peoples of the rest of Ireland and of Great Britain, who, though not on the scale of Northern Ireland, have suffered from terrorism and who, for many years have had to carry together a heavy burden of security costs, and in the case of my State have also suffered ~~severe~~ economic losses.

As a person with close friendships on the nationalist side and close family bonds on the unionist side I want to address myself directly to the people of Northern Ireland.

To nationalists and unionists alike I appeal:

Look at and evaluate this Agreement not as some people in both communities who are committed to maintaining divisions and hatreds, will attempt to portray it, but for what it is.