



**An Chartlann Náisiúnta**  
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Report of Meeting between the Taoiseach and the  
Four Church Leaders (Ireland).

Thursday, 1 October, 1992, at 2.30p.m.

Attendance

1. Cardinal Cahal Daly, Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland,  
The Most Rev. Dr. Robin Eames, Church of Ireland Archbishop of Armagh  
and Primate of All Ireland,  
The Right Rev. Dr. John Dunlop, Moderator of the General Assembly of  
the Presbyterian Church in Ireland,  
Rev. Derek Ritchie, President of the Methodist Church in Ireland  
accompanied by  
Rev. Samuel Hutchinson, Clerk of the General Assembly of the  
Presbyterian Church in Ireland,  
Rev. Edmund Mawhinney, General Secretary of the Methodist Church in  
Ireland,  
Joint Secretaries to the Leaders.

The Taoiseach, Mr. Albert Reynolds, T.D., was accompanied by Mr. Pat O'Sullivan, Principal Officer, Department of the Taoiseach.

Taoiseach's Opening Remarks

2. The Taoiseach said that he was delighted to have the opportunity of meeting the Church Leaders together for the first time. Although the meeting was intended to have taken place at an earlier date it was probably more opportune at this stage. The Government were committed to the same objectives as the Church Leaders as regards reconciliation, peace and justice. He went on to say that he had a satisfactory meeting with the British Prime Minister the previous week. The Irish Government had been concerned about the escalation of Loyalist violence. This concern could not be catered for because of the intensity of involvement in the current political talks and thus the need for the meeting with the Prime Minister. The British had accepted that cross-border security was satisfactory and had acknowledged recent Gardai arms finds etc. The agreement reached

X with the Prime Minister to further defer a meeting of the Anglo-Irish Conference until 16 November created space. Further space for the talks process could be created after that date if necessary. The holding of the Conference meeting would not necessarily end the talks process. The basic objective of the Irish Government in the talks was to try and bring about a peace formula which would be acceptable to both communities in Northern Ireland. The British Prime Minister shared that view.

### Press Statement

3. Dr. Dunlop indicated that it was usual for the Church Leaders to issue a press statement after their meetings. In that context, a draft statement was presented to the Taoiseach for clearance. The Taoiseach expressed his surprise at the inclusion of a number of the issues listed. Following clarification by the Leaders as to the broad outline of their concern on the issues the Taoiseach withdrew his reservations and the statement in the terms of that appended was issued on behalf of the Church Leaders.

### Political Talks

4. Dr. Dunlop said that the Church Leaders were very supportive of the talks process although they had refrained from public comment. He stressed the need for people in the South and Catholics generally to appreciate the fears of the Presbyterian community who although they looked secure in Northern Ireland did not actually feel so. In abiding by the Anglo-Irish Agreement the Irish and British Governments should be sensitive to the feelings of both traditions in the North. The unionists and Presbyterians perceived the Irish Government to be representing the nationalist outlook, particularly as represented by the SDLP. The Church Leaders were concerned about the reorganisation of the Loyalist paramilitary groups with younger leadership and tighter organisation which was more difficult for the police to infiltrate. They were also concerned about the Provisional IRA's continued campaign of violence which was causing

massive damage.

5. Archbishop Eames stressed the responsibility placed on all sides in the talks. Failure would be exploited by the paramilitaries and would greatly damage political dialogue for a long time to come. It would be of concern if some participants to the talks were merely going through the motions.
  
6. The Taoiseach agreed that it was important that all parties remain at the negotiating table. Dr. Dunlop and Mr. Ritchie pointed out that within all parties and in both communities in the North there was a genuine desire for agreement and a groundswell for peace. The Taoiseach said that it was important that a lot of talking be done to break down barriers. While he acknowledged that the DUP had a problem in their constituency as regards participation in the talks he could'nt understand why they had absented themselves for a period as they had been aware from the outset that the talks were being conducted on the basis of no preconditions.
  
7. Dr. Dunlop said that the three strands in the talks were important. The Taoiseach agreed stating that any new arrangements would have to transcend the Anglo-Irish Agreement.
  
8. Cardinal Daly, in referring to earlier comments of Dr. Dunlop, said that Roman Catholics would have assumed that Presbyterians and Protestants generally would be secure in the majority situation they found themselves in Northern Ireland. It was only laterly that he discovered that this was not so. Archbishop Eames said that unionists did not know who their friends were or who they could trust. Dr. Dunlop pointed out that the nationalist case had been promoted internationally over the last twenty years and it is was well understood. The unionist case was at a loss in that regard.

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The Protestants/unionists were more conscious that they were a minority within Ireland than that they were a majority in Northern Ireland. The number of Presbyterians in the North of Ireland was, however, being seriously reduced and this related not alone to areas such as Derry, Strabane and Newry. In a relatively short time Belfast would become a nationalist-controlled Council. The Provisional IRA's campaign was decimating the Presbyterian community and the republican tradition which should be capable of encompassing people of all religions was not doing so in some areas where there was population change. The Provisional IRA were a product of the system but the real problem was to arrive at an accommodation for the two traditions. Speeches by Dublin politicians were being listened to very intently by unionists and the Government should be aware of that.

9. Archbishop Eames said that it was important that the Government representatives at the talks should also be aware of the fear of the unionists. A clear indication that the outcome was not to strengthen the position of the nationalists was desirable to offset that fear. Dr. Dunlop and Archbishop Eames said that the unionists perceived the British role as being neutral. Archbishop Eames cited an example of lack of trust and fear of members of the Church of Ireland in the North as exemplified by a farmer harvesting in his field in County Tyrone while his wife stood guard with a shotgun.
  
10. The Taoiseach enquired about the Church Leaders views on the possible situation if the Provincial IRA declared a ceasefire. Mr. Ritchie pointed out that other paramilitaries existed. All agreed that the paramilitaries feed off each other as regards gangsterism and criminal activity. Dr. Dunlop recalled efforts in the mid 1960's to build co-operation between both communities. This was reflected when Pope John XXIII died and the flag on City Hall in Belfast was flown at half-mast. The campaign of violence over the past twenty years was a disaster but he reiterated that there was now a desire between both communities to accommodate each other. It was very

important that the Taoiseach and Government should listen to unionist politicians as well as SDLP.

11. The Taoiseach said that he could'nt understand why unionist politicians would seek to undermine the talks by concentrating on Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution as a bargaining point. These had not been an issue in the Sunningdale or Anglo-Irish Agreements. Previously security had always been cited as the unionists' main concern but that was no longer so. Archbishop Eames pointed out that the Articles contributed to unionists' insecurity and lack of response by the Government to their demands only worsened their fears. Dr. Dunlop felt that as long as the Articles were retained the unionists would worry about their position. Mr. Hutchinson said that the McGimpsey case had a devastating effect on unionists. The Taoiseach referred to the reasons for the insertion of Articles 2 and 3 in the Constitution which was to do away with IRA violence by removing that organisation's legitimacy. At no stage was any action taken to indicate that the Articles were a threat to unionists and successive Governments always indicated that their aim for reunification of the island would be pursued through peaceful means and only on the basis of consent. Removal of Articles 2 and 3 could make the situation worse in the event of no progress in the talks. Archbishop Eames said that whatever the intent, the Articles were seen by unionists as a threat to their position. Dr. Dunlop said that the decline of Presbyterians in the South added to his Northern members fears although the recent opening of the first Presbyterian church in the south this century in Kilkenny was a sign of hope. His members also perceived themselves as under threat from the international Catholic community and the effects of mixed marriage regulations.
  
12. The Taoiseach said that contrary to impressions he did not treat the SDLP favourably. He was determined to be even-handed in his approach to both sides in the talks. Dr. Dunlop pointed out that the Government faced an enormous communications job in building up trust with unionists. From speaking to Southern friends, he



appreciated the difficulties about interfering with Articles 2 and 3. The Anglo-Irish Agreement had placed a lot of stress on unionists and any new agreement must not add to that. Archbishop Eames stressed that a new agreement must be seen to be fair and the Taoiseach agreed.

#### Green Paper on Education

13. Archbishop Eames outlined three concerns about the Green Paper, which were largely shared by the Church of Ireland and the Catholic Church;
- (a) the long-term future of smaller schools which had a small number of teachers. The confidence of parishes was at stake,
  - (b) fair representation in the management structure of schools, and
  - (c) the length of time for discussions should be adequate to allow interests contribute to the development of policy.

Cardinal Daly said that the Churches had a common approach about the importance of preserving the religious ethos in their schools. The Taoiseach assured the Leaders that the Government did not intend to interfere with the ethos of the various Churches in the schools. He would speak to the Minister for Education about the timetable for the proposed White Paper and legislation.

#### Adelaide Hospital

14. Mr. Ritchie expressed concern about
- (a) preservation of the ethos of the hospital. A joint board for the new Tallaght hospital but run by the Adelaide could accommodate other points of view, and
  - (b) the existing hospital needed increased funds for more modern medical facilities.

X Cardinal Daly suggested that a degree of autonomy might be given to the Adelaide as a cohesive unit, within the new Tallaght complex, which would tap into general hospital facilities while preserving its

ethos. The nurses should continue to be trained together as in the Adelaide. The Taoiseach pointed out that the currency situation was affecting an announcement about the new Tallaght hospital. He was not familiar with the up-to-date position about the proposed management structure. The Government would respect the ethos of the Adelaide Hospital and he would have the matter of funding examined. Mr. Ritchie and Archbishop Eames asked that the timescale be looked at urgently.

#### Famine Relief For Somalia

- X 15. Mr. Ritchie said that the Churches were very concerned about Somalia, there was a good Irish record, North and South, in respect of support for charities. The British had reduced their contribution to overseas development aid by 15 per cent and he hoped that the Irish Government would maintain their contribution. The Taoiseach pointed out that he had raised the position of Somalia with the United Nations Secretary General and suggested that troops were needed to ensure proper distribution of food supplies. The President and the Minister for Foreign Affairs would shortly be leaving for Somalia. The Minister for Foreign Affairs had been very moved by what he had seen there on his last visit. The Taoiseach assured the Leaders that the Government had no plans to reduce the level of Irish overseas aid.

#### Conclusion

16. Both sides expressed appreciation for the exchange of views. Mr. Ritchie assured the Taoiseach of the prayers of the Church Leaders, particularly as regards the political talks. The meeting concluded at 4.p.m.