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STATEMENT BY THE FRIENDS OF IRELAND  
ST. PATRICK'S DAY, 1993

On this St. Patrick's Day, the Friends of Ireland in the United States Congress join with all Irish Americans and indeed Irish people everywhere in celebrating their common Irish heritage and in calling for renewed efforts to achieve peace, political progress and justice in Northern Ireland. We, in particular, welcome the Prime Minister of Ireland, An Taoiseach Albert Reynolds, to Washington and look forward to working closely with him, with the Deputy Prime Minister, Tánaiste Dick Spring, and with their colleagues in the new partnership Irish Government over the coming years.

Our concern for a peaceful and just solution in Ireland springs in large part from our personal commitment to Ireland but also from our consciousness of the exceptional contribution of generations of Irish men and women to the building of this nation. The recent census records 44 million Americans who claim Ireland as the home of their forebears. It reminds us how that small island has had an impact on our nation quite disproportionate to its size. It is a source of great sadness, therefore, that this celebration of our common Irish heritage is curtailed by the continuing tragedy of Northern Ireland.

Violence

We unreservedly condemn the violence of the IRA and of all paramilitary groups. Violence simply begets violence and creates a cycle of reprisal and revenge. It fosters division, bitterness and distrust. It seeks to destroy the bridges between the two communities which are an essential avenue to a peaceful sharing of their one island by Irish men and women of all persuasions and political allegiances.

Round-table talks

On the positive and political side, we warmly welcome and endorse last year's round-table talks between the Irish and British

governments and the constitutional parties in Northern Ireland. It is our earnest hope that these talks can be resumed in the near future. There can be no real political progress without genuine dialogue between those of all traditions who believe in a constitutional way forward on the island of Ireland.

#### United States role

We believe that, as always in the past, the United States Administration can play a constructive and helpful part in encouraging the two governments, and the parties, in advancing the political process. We enthusiastically welcome and applaud, therefore, the deep concern President Clinton has shown for the situation and his willingness to lend active support to the two governments, perhaps through appointing a Special Envoy, as they search together to find a way forward. We share the view of the Taoiseach that the constructive interest and support of the President and Congress of the United States has the potential to be uniquely helpful. There should now be urgent and wide consultation to ensure that this concern and commitment is structured in the most effective and helpful manner possible.

#### Anglo-Irish Agreement

The Friends of Ireland attach great importance to the continued and active implementation of the Anglo-Irish Agreement by the two governments. The Agreement, and in particular the role in Northern Ireland rightly assigned to the Irish Government under it, has introduced a new dynamic into the situation through its effort to give formal recognition to the equal legitimacy and status of the political, economic and social aspirations of the nationalist community. The Agreement, which has the full endorsement of the United States, must remain fully in force unless and until it is transcended by new arrangements acceptable to the Irish people.

#### Human Rights

The Agreement has sought to address a range of serious concerns in the human rights area, which have been well documented over the years by organisations such as Amnesty International and Helsinki Watch. These concerns include the use of lethal force by the

security forces, collusion between these forces and loyalist paramilitary groups and harassment of young nationalists by the British Army. We are, in this regard, deeply disturbed by the reports we have read of the Brian Nelson case. The continuation of abuses in these areas cannot be tolerated and specific abuses must be made the subject of full and independent investigation.

Confidence in the forces of law and order, and the administration of justice, is fundamental to the good government of any society. We strongly urge the two governments, therefore, to review in the Anglo-Irish Conference how best to put in place a series of radical measures in response to the wide gap in confidence which so clearly exists. A first elementary step in this direction would be to ensure that all military patrols, which come into contact with the public, are accompanied by experienced and trained police officers, as agreed in the 1985 arrangements between the two governments. This, in our view, should go some considerable way to help eliminate the demeaning pattern of harassment of young nationalists in Northern Ireland.

In addition, the ending of discrimination in employment would help greatly to establish hope and confidence among the nationalist community, especially the young people. We are encouraged by the terms of the 1989 Fair Employment Act and fervently hope that it has the necessary powers to redress decades of discrimination. This can be helped also by new investment from overseas.

#### International Fund

We are very pleased that our support here in Congress for the International Fund for Ireland has enabled it to play such a critical role in economic development, especially in the disadvantaged areas. In fostering economic and social progress, and building a record of success through cooperation and incentive, the Fund is providing a real measure of hope for those who have suffered most from the conflict in Northern Ireland. It has also, and most importantly, become a real catalyst for reconciliation and healing.

The International Fund, with its independent Board jointly appointed by both Governments, and its remit running throughout the

island of Ireland, is a model which may well have application in other areas in Ireland. With our positive experience of the Fund we would welcome, and be prepared to endorse, new initiatives along these lines.

Conclusion

We believe that the process of healing and reconciliation has been advanced in Ireland over the last twelve months. It is now critical that both minority communities - the nationalists in Northern Ireland and the Unionists on the island as a whole - be reached out to and further reassured. The Irish and British governments have the central responsibility to encourage and develop this process. In doing so, they will have our full and enthusiastic support. As Friends of Ireland, it is our dearest wish to see an agreed and newly energised Ireland, free from the dissensions of the past, playing its full, distinctive and dynamic part on the European and world stage.

Congress, Washington D.C. 17 March 1993