



An Chartlann Náisiúnta
National Archives

Reference Code: 2021/95/22

Creator(s): Department of the Taoiseach

Accession Conditions: Open

Copyright: National Archives, Ireland.
May only be reproduced with
the written permission of the
Director of the National
Archives.

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Statement by the Taoiseach on Northern Ireland situation,
Dail Eireann, Wednesday, 27 October, 1993.

All members of this House will, I know, wish to join me in expressing our abhorrence at the appalling death and injury inflicted on defenceless people on the Shankill Road last Saturday and at further sectarian murders in Belfast over the last few days. To all those who have been bereaved and injured in recent days, we convey our deepest sympathies.

I have stated on many occasions that those who perpetrate such actions have absolutely no mandate from the people, North or South, for their vicious campaigns. Excuses such as have been put forward are not acceptable. Tragic civilian deaths on a large scale are the inevitable and direct consequence from time to time of any bombing campaign, whatever the intentions or the warnings.

I can assure the House and people North and South that the Government will continue to take all necessary measures to combat paramilitary violence. Our commitment in this regard is clear and unambiguous. We continue to provide all necessary resources to the Garda Síochána and the Defence Forces. The Irish taxpayer contributes three or four times more to the cost of security related to the Northern situation than his or her British counterpart. We have had many successes in recent times in uncovering arms, capable of causing large-scale loss of life and destruction in the North. We will also exercise the greatest vigilance in order to prevent any attacks on this jurisdiction.

We continue to review the effectiveness of the various legal measures in force. In this regard, the Government will shortly introduce measures to amend our

extradition legislation. The primary purpose of these measures will be to provide for an amendment of the Extradition Act of 1987 in order to further clarify the circumstances in which offences are excluded from the political offence exception and to deal with issues raised by the judgements of the Supreme Court in the Magee, McKee and Sloan cases.

Security co-operation with the Northern Ireland and British authorities is effective, and the Government will ensure that it remains so. Paramilitary organisations should be in no doubt as to our determination to deal with their terrorist activities in every way open to us.

Northern Ireland has in recent weeks witnessed a serious upsurge in violence from paramilitaries on both sides. Each atrocity provokes a vicious response from the other side, and it seems that there is no end to the spiral of mistrust and hate. People live in fear of answering a knock on the front door or of going about their daily tasks. Can we offer any hope to the people who are trapped in this awful way? Must they and their children face a further 25 years of violence? When the immediate crisis dies down, we still have to face the underlying problems of the situation, and we must never be deflected from our search for peace and political progress.

The people of Northern Ireland must not give way to despair. The vast majority have shown restraint and dignity in the past in the face of provocation. Any other approach would only prolong and aggravate the sorrow and heartache of the past few days.

The Irish Government remain convinced that the problems of Northern Ireland have to be resolved by a process of political dialogue and cooperation between parties dedicated to the democratic process. There can be no other way.

People ask what progress has been made in this regard. It is sometimes forgotten that for some seven months last year a process of political talks was undertaken. For the first time, Irish Government Ministers met with leaders of the Unionist tradition. The issues discussed at that time were not and are not capable of instant solution. Nevertheless, there was progress. Each side went away with a better understanding of each others concerns than was possible before. These concerns were conveyed with a remarkable degree of goodwill and sincerity and with recognition that the validity of both traditions had to be respected in any eventual

settlement. The Government remain firmly of the view that this recognition will have to be at the centre of any solution. As I said recently, both the Unionist and the Nationalist communities have identities and important rights which cannot be ignored. We must all recognise that a broad accommodation of different identities, rights and aspirations can only be on the basis of freely given agreement and consent.

Can we build on the valuable foundation which has been laid? The Irish Government stand ready to do so and to approach talks with an open mind and without pre-conditions. We do not accept the argument that a resumption of these talks would be pointless. Talks are never pointless between constitutional parties committed to the democratic process. I would echo the call of the leaders of the main Churches in Ireland, who have called on political leaders, to show courage and vision in the present situation. Both the Tánaiste and I have made clear our openness to dialogue with Unionist political leaders to advance the cause of just and lasting peace. I am convinced such dialogue could also hasten progress towards a permanent cessation of all violence. If Unionist leaders consider that the Irish Government are not fully alert to their views on the issues which confront us all, we stand ready to listen to them at any time and any place. In the meantime, I have made arrangements to meet the leader of the Alliance Party, Dr. John Alderdice next week.

There is a tremendous desire for peace among the vast majority of the people of this country, North and South. The violence is utterly senseless. It will not promote or advance any political cause. It does not serve the interests of any community. It simply inflicts pain and suffering and grief on families and communities across the North. It damages the reputation of this country abroad. It is harmful to our efforts for economic development, and diverts vast resources into maintaining security, which could be better used elsewhere.

Ever since I came to office, I have made the achievement of peace my first priority. I am deeply committed to finding a formula for peace, which will allow a process of peace to begin with a complete and lasting cessation of violence.

We all fervently wish that those engaged in violence would heed the voices of political leaders, church leaders and community leaders, all of whom rightly demand that the slaughter be brought to an end without delay. At the same time, it is the duty of both Governments to do anything and everything in their power,

consistent with their long-established principles and obligations, to hasten that day. An absolute commitment to peace is needed from everyone, because it is unfortunately the reality that it is unlikely to come about of its own accord.

I am convinced, notwithstanding the terrible events of the last few days, that an opportunity for peace may exist, and if so, that it must be grasped. The two Governments have a responsibility to ensure, that if indeed the opportunity does exist, that it is not allowed to pass. The immediate situation in Northern Ireland is threatening enough. We cannot allow a slide into worse violence in the near future. Neither the British nor the Irish Government would be lightly forgiven, if either were to ignore or reject a genuine opportunity for peace.

There has been much discussion in recent times of the Hume-Adams dialogue. I would like in this context to salute the courageous role of John Hume in that dialogue and the crucial part he has played in advancing the acceptance of principles, which carried to their logical conclusion should bring about peace.

However, the creation of a peace process has to be more widely based, and to involve the two Governments, conscious of both their international obligations and their wider responsibilities to both communities. Consistent with these, the two Governments must work together to reach a common understanding in their own terms on a framework for peace. Any initiative can only be taken by the two Governments, and there can be no question of them simply adopting or endorsing the report of the Hume-Adams dialogue that was recently given to us and which we have not passed on to the British Government. Much of the current speculation is to that extent inaccurate and has a misleading focus. The British Government have made it clear that they are always prepared to listen to what the Irish Government have to say to them. The Irish Government have been working for some time past on the elaboration of a formula for peace, and our view is that both Governments must act and work together.

Such a formula would have to take account of many vital concerns on all sides. The purpose of the formula would be to help bring about a permanent cessation of violence and the commencement of a peace process, which would lead in time to a just and lasting political settlement or in other words peace in the fullest sense of the word.

I would like to repeat there can be no question of trying to predetermine the future or to impose any particular kind of political settlement, which must be left to negotiations between democratic Governments and the constitutional political parties. There can be no question of tampering with the principle of consent, as set out in Article 1 of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. But, subject to that constraint, the people of Ireland, North and South, have the right to determine their own future. We are prepared to accept into the democratic process any party that permanently and verifiably renounces violence.

The House will understand that I am not able to say more at the moment. If a peace process is to be advanced, great sensitivity has to be exercised. International experience shows that results are best achieved in circumstances of complete confidentiality.

I will be meeting Prime Minister John Major on Friday to discuss urgently the current situation and the best way in which both Governments can advance progress towards peace and the process of dialogue that could lead to a political settlement.

Both Governments have a duty and responsibility to look on the present situation and to quickly address their minds to what will restore hope and confidence in the democratic process. We cannot hand over the stage to the paramilitaries on either side. Time is not on our side.