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ÁRD FHEIS ADDRESS BY
AN TAOISEACH, ALBERT REYNOLDS, T.D., PRESIDENT OF FIANNA FÁIL
SATURDAY, 6 NOVEMBER, 1993

I want to thank this Árd Fheis for the honour of re-electing me as President of Fianna Fáil.

It's a proud and challenging task: managing change for this great Party, so that it can move into the twenty-first century, confident of shaping it, as it has shaped the twentieth century.

This sixtieth Árd Fheis is historic. Its central theme is TRANSFORMING THE NATION.

Tonight, I want to focus on a small number of key issues of concern to the people of this country and central to this modern, progressive, Republican Party.

This Party has always had people, and policies, and pride: great traditions and a great hunger to achieve what is best for the nation.

Particularly significant, this year, is our Party's new Constitution.

Its first Section states that Fianna Fáil - and I quote -

"Aims to secure, through peaceful means, the unity of Ireland and her people; to protect and respect their different traditions..."

Which brings me to the issue I know is at the front of all our minds: the North, and the overwhelming importance of the search for peace.

Peace is a small word. But it is a word which encapsulates the hopes of humanity throughout the ages. Peace is also a word much abused. We hear it from many lips. We are told that the Unionists want peace, so do the Nationalists, the Irish Government, the British Government, the organisations that bombed the Shankill Road and that authorised the killing at Greysteel. Everybody apparently wants peace. But what do we get? Violence, death, funerals, walls of wilted flowers, and an eternity of tears.

This Party has a special responsibility to look for a solution. The Irish people are entitled to look to us for leadership, courage and conviction. We are a Republican Party, but, above all else we are, a democratic Party.

We represent the ideals of peaceful democratic Republicanism: We have to work out how best to apply those ideals in a changed world and in a situation involving conflicting rights - a more complex situation than existed during the independence struggle from 1916 to 1921. We must not be prisoners of history. It must not be said of us that we forgot nothing and learned nothing.

The Anglo-Irish Settlement of 1921 ultimately failed, because it did not provide adequately for the Nationalist community in Northern Ireland. The challenge facing this generation is to finally break the cycle of violence: to stop the crucifixion of two communities. We must give Ireland a true peace, a peace never seen up to now, a peace based on justice and equality, not on domination or denial of rights.

Historic wrongs there undoubtedly have been. There have been historic wrongs between France and Germany, in the Middle East, in South Africa. Yet in all these places, today, there is peace, or at least a real hope and prospect of peace.

On this island, the deep sense of injury and frustration, the grim experience of discrimination and neglect have provided powerful fuel for the Troubles. That cycle has to stop.

- We have to bring marginalised and excluded communities in from the cold.
- We've got to bring all points of view and experience to bear on the political process.
- We've got to put an end to the ghettos, an end to the walls currently separating people for their own safety, an end to the cratered roads that cut off the lifeblood of border communities.

We can do it quickly, once violence permanently ceases.

Peace we must have. Since I came to office as Taoiseach, I have been deeply and personally committed to, and involved in, the search for peace, and in particular the development of an initiative that could be taken by the two Governments based on a formula for peace. It has been and remains a very difficult exercise to establish a

basis which would have widespread support and meet all legitimate concerns. John Major and I have discussed how progress can be made on this, on many occasions, going back to our first meeting in early 1992.

My meeting with John Major last week committed both Governments to establish a framework for peace, bearing in mind our wider responsibilities and obligations. We are both entitled to look for a degree of patience and understanding and for restraint, as we work towards this great objective.

Who is afraid of peace? People have democratic rights, and we cannot pre-determine for them, without their consent, the political structures under which they'll be governed - now, or in the future. Nor can we impose an artificial time limit within which majority consent must be achieved.

The dynamic for progress must reside in the full use of the democratic political process, in the underlying changes in Irish society, North and South, and in our external environment.

I believe I speak for almost all the people of this State, when I say that while we still continue to strive for a united Ireland based on agreement and on consent freely given, we have no interest in a forced unity, based on coercion. Such a forced unity would create a future of permanent instability. It would block the fuller development of the entire island.

I want to acknowledge and pay tribute to John Hume and the outstanding and courageous role he has played as a champion of constitutional politics and a genuine peace-seeker in the most appalling conditions. His contribution is essential to any wide-based overall framework for peace. The creation of that peace must ultimately be the responsibility of the Irish and the British Governments.

Peace cannot wait for a political settlement. It is needed now. But peace will improve the prospects of achieving a durable political solution. While our first priority is to establish peace, which I see as a distinct but separate process, I also believe the talks process must be resumed immediately. I repeat that in the event of an overall settlement, but not unilaterally, balanced constitutional change can take place.

We all recognise that a new quality of relationship between Unionists and Nationalists is the essential first task in a more peaceful Ireland. New patterns of

co-operation must transcend the antagonisms of a century between the two political cultures.

Those of us who are strong in our convictions, let us proceed from that strength. The ideals we cherish and uphold have an inherent strength that will never go away. Firm in that knowledge, let us, in this Party, be committed to whatever is required to bring about peace, which would be the greatest accomplishment of our lifetime.

A just and lasting peace will do more than anything else to restore national pride and morale.

It will gradually heal the wounds between people and communities North and South.

It will do more for employment and for our economic future than any other measure.

It will clear the way for the people in both parts of Ireland, working together, and harnessing our economic strengths, to find our place, where we belong, in the forefront of the developed countries of the world.

Our humane and civilized values and the contribution that we can make will no longer be sullied by our unresolved conflict at home.

No-one should underestimate the difficulties and the formidable obstacles that have yet to be overcome, if peace is to be achieved.

I appeal to all political and church leaders to join with me in making a commitment now to peace and the peace process. Together, we can make the beginning of peace a reality, before this year is out.

I am convinced that a real opportunity for peace exists. Opportunity comes to pass but not to pause. I intend to grasp it. I will continue to display the political courage and conviction necessary to see this process through to a successful conclusion. I hope others will too.