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Statement by the Taoiseach, Mr. Albert Reynolds, T.D.,
on the situation in Northern Ireland, Dáil Éireann,
Thursday, 1 April, 1993 at 10.45 a.m.

The Government have two primary objectives:

- the establishment of peace in Northern Ireland
- making an impact on reducing the problem of unemployment.

- Both objectives are inter-linked.

The deaths of two children from bombs in Warrington and the killing of four Catholic workers in Castlerock last week as well as other recent tragedies have brought home to us, by no means for the first time, the reality of violence and its total unacceptability.

There have been over 3,000 deaths in Northern Ireland alone over a period of more than 20 years. To these must be added deaths in Britain, here in the Republic and on the European Continent. The lives of human beings of all ages and backgrounds have been destroyed in an instant, wrecking families and communities in the process. Many of the victims have been completely random. Attacks have occurred at times and in places, where no danger could reasonably be expected. No section of the community has been spared. Many of the deaths have taken place in particularly horrible circumstances; bodies blown to pieces, groups of people sprayed with bullets, executions in lonely lanes, in certain cases sadistic killings, children and young adults killed by plastic bullets, young people and people with young families in a uniform or out of it, whose lives have been brought to an abrupt and untimely end.

It all amounts to a litany of horror, which has not brought a political resolution to the problems of Northern Ireland one whit closer.

All of us would want to express again our deepest sympathies to the families of Jonathan Ball and Tim Parry in Warrington and to the families of the workers killed in the quiet village of Castlerock last week, as well as of other recent victims of

violence. Those who perpetrate these actions have no mandate from the people of Ireland, North or South, regardless of the cause they purport to serve. The Irish community in Britain do not deserve to be exposed to the ill-feeling that inevitably arises from incidents like those that occurred in Warrington. There are no acceptable excuses. Tragic civilian deaths are the inevitable and foreseeable consequence of any bombing campaign, whatever the intentions or the warnings. Responsibility cannot be evaded or shifted elsewhere.

Once again, as happened after Enniskillen, the people of this country are saying loudly and forthrightly that they want the violence to stop, that they repudiate any campaign of violence carried out in their name. The self-determination of the Irish people is unequivocal on this point and has been made clear repeatedly. Humanity must come before any politics.

From time to time we encounter veiled suggestions that this State is a "safe haven" for paramilitaries to plan and launch terrorist attacks in other jurisdictions. I want to take this opportunity to refute these allegations in the strongest possible terms, on behalf of the Government and the overwhelming majority of the Irish people who have consistently shown their support for constitutional parties at the ballot box.

The Irish Government have always condemned paramilitary violence and employed all means at their disposal to combat the evils of terrorism. The measure of the Irish Government's response to the Provisional IRA and other paramilitary organisations is evident in their on-going commitment to providing all necessary resources for the Garda Síochána and the Defence Forces, the enactment and application of legal measures, and the maintenance of effective security co-operation with the Northern Ireland and British authorities. The notion of a "safe haven" for terrorists in this State is a fallacy, which is clearly exposed by the reality of:

- our per capita expenditure on security, which is three times that of the United Kingdom;
- the fact that several offenders are serving long sentences in Portlaoise prison for subversive offences;
- the huge and growing stockpile of arms and explosives in Garda custody as a result of seizures from bunkers, and
- the experience of many of those persons whom our courts have imprisoned here in connection with serious offences committed in other jurisdictions or who have been extradited for trial.

Commentators who persist in alleging that this State is somehow soft on terrorism would do well to consider these realities, before making misleading claims. Opposition leaders should not lend credibility to hostile propaganda in the press designed to make this country responsible for weaknesses in security elsewhere.

The mere fact that a person is suspected - even strongly suspected - of being involved in criminal activities does not, of course, constitute a basis for arrest and prosecution. This is true, irrespective of whether those concerned reside here, in Northern Ireland, or in the United Kingdom. In all cases, the authorities require evidence, before they can act. The gathering of evidence here is not hampered by lack of resources, and the absence of sufficient evidence to convict suspects wherever they reside cannot be taken as implying that either jurisdiction is disposed to harbour terrorists or that either is a "safe haven".

Legal co-operation with Northern Ireland and Britain in respect of fugitive offenders takes a number of forms. The extradition arrangements we have been operating with Britain and the North provide one means, by which a person can be returned to the jurisdiction in which the offence has been committed. The provision made for extra-territorial trial is an alternative means by which a person can be brought to trial in one jurisdiction for offences committed in the other. These are complementary procedures, and both Governments are committed to their use in appropriate cases. Both Governments are also committed to strengthening those procedures, where change is necessary and desirable. The moves are not just on one side. The British Government are incorporating specialty into their legislation in a Criminal Justice Bill, which provides additional statutory safeguards for accused persons, at present going through Parliament. They have also finally ratified the European Convention on Extradition in 1991, which Ireland ratified over 25 years ago.

For our part, the Minister for Justice has already made clear her intention to bring proposals to Government as soon as possible to tidy up our extradition laws by amending the Extradition Acts. The primary purpose of that legislation 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. However, while it is necessary and desirable to close loopholes that have been established to exist only since late 1991, we should not be

under any illusions, that on its own, that Act will have any great practical impact in bringing violence to an end.

No one would deny the existence of a strong sense of grievance and injustice felt by the Nationalist community in Northern Ireland. For a long time they were treated as aliens in their own country. To the sense of injustice about partition was added the injustice of a long period of systematic and blatant discrimination. But there are political remedies to these ills, even if some of them will take time. Nothing justifies the creation of new injustices, or the attempt to force the issue in a totally counterproductive way that drives the communities even further apart.

If we look abroad, we can see examples that are inspiring, as well as examples that contain awful lessons. Most of the countries of Eastern Europe suffered for 40 years the most appalling oppression with no freedom of opinion or personal liberty. Eventually, there were largely peaceful revolutions, in which popular power was exerted, not unlike the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland in the late 1960s, and an undemocratic system of Government was removed. If we look on the other hand to Cyprus, the Lebanon or the former Yugoslavia, we see countries torn apart, as factions try to solve ethnic disputes by force. Instead of the prize of a peaceful and prosperous united country, they have dismembered it, and created even more intractable divisions, which it may take generations to heal, if ever.

All parties in this House and the vast majority of the Irish people everywhere are convinced that the genuine problems of Northern Ireland, both in the present and in the future have to be resolved by a process of political dialogue and cooperation between parties dedicated to the democratic process. I would again appeal to the paramilitaries on both sides to think again on the futile course they are pursuing. Surely few of them in their hearts can relish taking a life. A Unionist life is just as sacred as a Nationalist life.

I accept that the Unionist community also have legitimate grievances. There is no justification for the terrorist attacks, of which many of their members have been victims. The Irish Government proceed from the self-evident basis, that both traditions have a permanent place and permanent rights on this island that must be firmly guaranteed in any settlement. They both have an even greater contribution to make in the future.

I would have to express my equal concern and revulsion at the recent upsurge in loyalist violence, which last year and so far this year has claimed more lives in ~~Northem~~ Northern Ireland than any other source. It is very disturbing, that some of this violence, may have a part of its source in collusion between paramilitaries and a small number of individual members of the security forces or the intelligence services, and this is a matter that we have repeatedly raised in the Anglo-Irish Conference. I would like to see the same forceful condemnation by all democratic political parties in the North of both the campaign by the Provisional IRA and the indiscriminate sectarian murders by the loyalist paramilitaries. There is a very clear attempt at present to intimidate and terrorize the entire Nationalist community, and not least its elected politicians in the run-up to the local elections. I regret very much certain attempts to provide political explanations of so-called loyalist violence, which can all too easily be seen as providing some justification for it. This morning's shocking revelation of the extent of support among loyalists for violence shows that all and not just some Unionist political leaders must be unequivocal in their condemnation.

We in this State are proud of our independence, and are grateful to the generations both of constitutional politicians in the 19th century, and of the republican leaders from the United Irishmen to the 1916-21 period, who together, and in different ways, strove for freedom, and the sum of whose efforts eventually achieved it, for the greater part of Ireland. But it was clear to most Irish leaders even 75 years ago that the use of force against fellow Irishmen was an inappropriate means of solving the deep-seated divisions between Unionist and Nationalist in the North of Ireland.

Partition was adopted as a temporary expedient in 1920. As some historians have observed, nothing lasts so long, as pragmatic solutions, intended to be temporary. It is important to remind ourselves of the balance between conflicting constitutional ideals and aspirations adopted at that time. It was not just Irish Nationalists, but the British Government as well, who recognized that Ireland ought to be united in the longer-term. The Government of Ireland Act 1920, which partitioned the country, was based on the concept of the essential unity of Ireland. It sought to foster the development of North-South cooperation through a Council of Ireland, designed - I quote from the Act - 'with a view to the eventual establishment of a Parliament for the whole of Ireland'.

It was the Anglo-Irish Treaty in 1921 that first established the Irish Free State and gave it nominal jurisdiction over the 32 counties. At the same time it gave the

Northern Ireland Parliament, the right of secession, though still subject, for the time being, to the provisions in the Government of Ireland Act, encouraging eventual Irish unity.

Is it any wonder then that in the Irish Constitution of 1937 these underlying principles of national unity were reiterated in the first three Articles? These express the Irish nation's right to self-determination, acknowledged by the British in 1920-1, while limiting effective jurisdiction to the 26 counties. While successive British Governments since 1949 have guaranteed that Northern Ireland, will remain part of the United Kingdom, as long as a majority of their parliament or people wish, even this conditional formulation reflects, however obliquely, the fact that there was explicit recognition in 1920-1, that ultimately the people of Ireland North and South ought to come together. Since the 1970s it has been made more explicit once again, that the people of Northern Ireland are free to join a united Ireland, if a majority so desire. The present Secretary of State for Northern Ireland stated recently in a speech to the Foreign Press Association - and I quote:

"if one looks at an island of that size with no natural territorial divide of a geographical kind, then if other things were equal, and there was no historical influence which is decisive, there is no reason why it should not, and the natural thing is that it would be one political entity".

He added that there was of course a very strong historical overlay.

The provisions in our Constitution are not unique. There were close parallels in Article 23 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany, the preamble of which stated: "the entire German people are called upon to achieve in free self-determination the unity and freedom of Germany". The spirit of Article 23 of the German Constitution was almost identical in wording to Article 3 of our Constitution. "For the time being the Basic Law shall apply in the territory of the states of Bavaria, Hamburg etc. In other parts of Germany, it shall be put into force on their accession." The same criticisms were made of the German Constitution, as are made of ours, that it made a theoretical claim over those who did not participate in its drafting, that it presented a phantom which would not stand up in international law compared with the reality of the West German State. Of course, the circumstances are not exactly the same, but nevertheless what has happened since, has justified those parties who were not dismissive about that part of the German Constitution. Now Article 23 has

become redundant in the context of German unity, and no longer exists. The CSCE has always kept open the possibility of the peaceful change of frontiers.

Let us remember that our Constitution took the gun out of politics on this side of the border by providing a constitutional framework, which all political parties could accept. The Constitution was never recognised by republican paramilitary groups until recently and never invoked by them to justify their campaign. All Irish people now want another framework that will take the bomb and bullet out of the politics of the entire island.

In our agreed Programme for Government, stressing the importance of dialogue, we speak of a "willingness to discuss all constitutional issues and to initiate and incorporate change in the context of an overall settlement. Our long-term policy is to make possible the eventual achievement of a united Ireland by agreement and consent in the spirit of the New Ireland Forum Report". The Programme also speaks "of seeking any necessary endorsement in a referendum for an agreed policy, which achieves a balanced accommodation of the differing positions of the two main traditions on constitutional issues". This was an idea that I endorsed last October in my Bodenstown speech.

If we want peace, if we want a political solution, we cannot ignore or gloss over the fundamental position of either community. The present Irish constitutional position means a great deal to the Nationalist community in Northern Ireland. They see it as affirmation that they belong to the Irish nation. They also see it as giving the Irish Government a status to negotiate with the British Government on their behalf. It reflects their deeply held convictions about partition. In effect, the first three Articles are seen as the Irish constitutional guarantee to Northern Nationalists.

None of us have any difficulty in recognizing the facts of a situation. It is another thing to ask people to endorse as morally right, a situation which they feel deep down represents an historic injustice. Our commitment to a united Ireland is expressed in constitutional terms, with an explicit commitment in Article 29 to settle international disputes by peaceful means. Any attempt in a political vacuum to walk away from constitutional republicanism, would be a very dangerous exercise, and would most certainly provide a new recruiting platform for terrorism. Constitutional change therefore, must be placed in the context of a broad-ranging agreement, that includes a balanced constitutional accommodation, one that not only recognizes and respects the importance of the present wishes of a majority but also the validity and legitimacy

of an agreed Ireland as a long-term goal. I am happy to endorse the idea that goes back to the Forum Report that in any future situation the rights of minorities should be entrenched. A similar type of proposal has recently been put forward by the Tánaiste in the form of a covenant.

It is not enough merely to insist on our constitutional position, and to hope that somehow or other peace and Irish unity will ensue. Every leader of this country from de Valera down to the present day, sought creatively to achieve political progress, not resting solely on the fundamental position but making efforts to advance and reach out. Indeed, the very foundation of Fianna Fáil in 1926 and its decision to participate in the Dáil, came as the result of a break with the orthodox and inflexible dogmas of the then Sinn Féin Party, which offered no hope of advance. In 1937, de Valera included a little known provision in the Constitution, Article 15.2.2 which allows for the recognition of subordinate legislatures. This was the basis for de Valera's offer to the Unionists to keep Stormont, with appropriate guarantees for the minority, if sovereignty were transferred. He was also prepared to keep bridges open by his offer of external association first made in 1921 and repeated publicly or privately over the rest of his career.

Seán Lemass broke with the reflex of non-recognition, in a form of Nordpolitik of his own, in his famous meetings with the Unionist Prime Minister Captain O'Neill. As part of an Oireachtas Committee he was also prepared to contemplate constitutional change, if that would advance the situation.

Jack Lynch was the first to face the challenge of the current Northern troubles. He made it clear from the outset in 1969, that the Government sought reunification of the country by peaceful means and by agreement. He said that, of its nature this policy was a long-term one, with the initial objective being to promote peace and goodwill and to eradicate bigotry and discrimination. He laid the foundations for the Sunningdale Agreement subsequently signed by the Government of Liam Cosgrave.

Charles Haughey initiated the Anglo-Irish process in 1980, which asserts the central role and responsibility of the two Governments, and which was subsequently developed into the Anglo-Irish Agreement by the Government of Garret FitzGerald and Dick Spring in the aftermath of the New Ireland Forum.

This present Partnership Government between Fianna Fáil and Labour have the same duty as our predecessors, not to retreat to the certainties of the past, but to

strive for a decisive political breakthrough that will help to bring about a new formula for peace.

The Government are deeply committed to the achievement of a lasting political settlement which will accommodate the two traditions in Ireland on equal terms and which will bring about a new beginning for relationships within Northern Ireland, within the island of Ireland, and between the peoples of these islands. It was to achieve such a settlement that my previous Government recommenced a process of political talks between April and November last.

Those talks were unique in their scope and significance. Never before had the fundamental issues, which lie at the heart of the Northern Ireland problem been addressed in a systematic and collective way, by the two Governments and the four main constitutional parties of Northern Ireland. Never before had Irish Government Ministers engaged in a prolonged face-to-face dialogue with leaders of the Unionist tradition. The fact that it proved possible to get all participants around a table together, and to sustain this process over a period of several months, was in itself a remarkable breakthrough and marked a watershed on the road to a political solution. It signalled the critical importance of a wide-ranging political dialogue between the two Governments and the parties in the search for a lasting settlement.

Those talks would not have taken place without commitment, goodwill and determination on the part of all concerned. Those qualities were also responsible for the significant degree of progress realised during the talks. I hope that the same constructive qualities will enable us all to return to the negotiating table soon. The need for an agreed political settlement has never been more apparent or more pressing.

There is, of course, no easy route to such a settlement. The problems which we confronted in last year's talks were deep-seated and long-standing. Our endeavour was an ambitious one, and we all recognised this at the outset. We were seeking to resolve profound tensions and divisions which have disrupted our relationships going back over several centuries. It was hardly surprising, therefore, that it did not prove possible to achieve, within the time available, the comprehensive accommodation of our differences at which we were all aiming.

What we did achieve in that short period, however, was a considerably better understanding of each other's concerns than we had ever had before - and a much

fuller sense of the sincerely held positions on both sides which must be reconciled in any lasting settlement. The need for political arrangements which respect the validity of both traditions seemed generally accepted. We identified and discussed most of the elements which would comprise an eventual settlement. We also established constructive dialogue on ways in which an accommodation might be reached on some of the key issues which divide us.

In short, therefore, we laid an extremely valuable foundation for future talks which may take us further along the road towards a comprehensive settlement. As we have already indicated on many occasions, the two Governments are of the view that further dialogue is both necessary and desirable. A promising foundation exists upon which we can build. I hope that all participants will recognise that we should do so soon without further delay.

The positive and constructive approach of the Irish Government has been evident from the very outset. We facilitated the talks process by making clear in advance, along with the British Government, that we would be prepared to consider a new and more broadly based agreement than the Anglo-Irish Agreement, if such an arrangement could be arrived at through direct discussion and negotiation between all of the parties. We also agreed a series of arrangements relating to meetings of the Anglo-Irish Conference to facilitate such discussions.

Throughout the talks last year, we indicated clearly our readiness to contemplate change in the interest of achieving a "new beginning" for the various relationships. However, change could not be in one direction only. We wished to see change on both sides in the interest of achieving a fair and honourable accommodation between the needs, rights and aspirations of both traditions. If the negotiations were to achieve the basis of a "new beginning" in the relationship between Nationalism and Unionism, and if an agreement were to entail any constitutional consequences in our jurisdiction, I felt both Governments would respond positively to that situation and that we "could approach the electorate with the hope and prospect of a positive response".

That, after all, is the essential consideration. It is the electorate's judgement in any referendum, and not the wishes of the Government or any individual, which will determine whether or not changes can be made. It follows that we need to have an opportunity to assess all the proposals for change in their full practical and political context. That is why it is important to get back to the negotiating table.

The Government worked actively for agreement in last year's talks. We have worked more assiduously to achieve an early resumption of talks this year. We have set no preconditions to our partners. We have made clear that we are ready to sit down at any time and in any place. I hope that others will show equal flexibility and commitment. The saving of a single life in the North or elsewhere demands that flexibility and commitment from all political leaders. When talks resume, the Government will have its own proposals to present. We will also be ready to discuss the proposals which other participants wish to present, or which they may already have presented. We are prepared to discuss everything, once we all return to the table. But that is where the discussion should take place. To select for discussion in advance of fresh negotiations only proposals or papers which individual delegations tabled at the end of the last round would not, I think, be conducive to a successful outcome.

As regards the UUP proposal for an Inter-Irish Relations Committee, the Government are, of course, fully prepared to discuss this idea, when talks resume. However, I would like to correct any impression which may exist, that this proposal has not been studied by the Government. When the UUP first advanced it earlier on in last year's talks, it received our full consideration. It was then reiterated in a UUP paper of 9 November. We are still open to be convinced across the table that it would represent, as the Ulster Unionists claim, a major step forward. However, it would be wrong to base future discussions just on the framework of the Unionist set of proposals, as suggested by Deputy Bruton last week. All the ideas and proposals on the table, including both the SDLP's and the Unionists, as well as those from the two Governments, will merit equal weight and consideration in future negotiations.

The concentration on constitutional difficulties can obscure the progress that is possible on political and institutional questions, and on economic co-operation. Even if only a limited understanding is possible on all constitutional issues at this time, it is still well worthwhile to seek agreements in areas where more unites us than divides us. There is clearly some potential for agreement on political institutions in Northern Ireland, which would allow the constitutional parties to share responsibility for government there. But in the words of the Report of the New Ireland Forum: "A settlement which recognises the legitimate rights of Nationalists and Unionists must transcend the context of Northern Ireland".

Closer co-operation between North and South is imperative in the context of the Single European Market and the consequent creation of a single market economy on the island of Ireland, and also in the context of the wise use of resources in almost every economic and social area. Co-operation is needed in the European Community in dealing with issues that affect the island of Ireland as a whole, or which require a cross-border approach. Co-operation on security would be necessary, even in a far more peaceful context than exists today. The two Governments also have an important role, acknowledged under the Anglo-Irish Agreement, in recognising and upholding the identities, rights and interests of both communities.

The question arises as to whether separate North-South institutions should be established, in which the British Government would play no direct part, or whether it would be better to expand or adapt the role of the Conference to include the full participation of both Governments and the parties to a Northern Administration.

One of the principal contributions of Fianna Fáil since it took office in 1987 has been to place far greater emphasis in the Conference on economic issues and on North South economic co-operation, with economic Ministers in regular attendance. Last May, I published a comprehensive study Ireland in Europe: A Shared Challenge, which sets out many of the opportunities that exist to increase employment, through the greater integration of the two economies on this island. By enlarging the size of the home market, we can give indigenous industries a chance to develop to a size, where they are able to become exporters. There is scope for joint marketing and promotion of Irish tourism, of Irish products abroad, for the development of complementary manufacturing activities, particularly linkages to multinational firms, and for a strong single voice in Europe for Irish agriculture and fisheries. The business organisations see substantial opportunities and employment potential. Independent studies show that up to 75,000 new jobs could be created on a basis of all-Ireland co-operation. Our task is to create the political climate, so that these economic exchanges can flourish. Some of these areas for action were foreseen as far back as the Government of Ireland Act 1920, but were not developed subsequently.

By our own improved economic performance in recent years we have made ourselves a more interesting partner for Northern business and for many ordinary people. In many respects our welfare system is now superior to that in the North, especially in relation to older people. I have always subscribed to the view

expressed by Eamon de Valera at the 1933 Fianna Fáil Ard Fheis on the way to reunite the country, when he said:

"There is no use in pretending that we can solve that by mere words. We cannot; nor can we solve it by force. We have got to solve it, as I have said, in the only way it can be solved, and that is by having a livelihood for our people down here which will be the envy of the people of the North and make them see that their future lies with their own people and not with strangers".

The INTERREG Programme and the International Fund can do much to improve the economy of border areas and other deprived parts of Northern Ireland. Major infrastructural projects are underway, such as the Ballinamore-Ballyconnell Canal, now nearing completion, and the upgrading of the Dublin-Belfast railway. I do not think Unionists have any major difficulty about this type of co-operation, which is as of much benefit to them as it is to the rest of us. The economic border is gone - only the political border remains.

In the absence of a new political agreement, we will pursue this co-operation vigorously within the Anglo-Irish Conference. We will also seek to promote judicial and other reforms and create a better sense of fairness in the eyes of the law. Further intensive efforts are needed to achieve greater equality. Down here, the Government are committed to a radical programme of affirmative action, with regard to equality, including the aim of having women representing 40% of the composition of State boards. We will also have targets for increasing the number of physically handicapped people in the public service. If existing fair employment legislation does not show results, a similar type of approach may have much to recommend it in Northern Ireland, if we want to set an example in reducing the employment imbalance between Protestant and Catholic, especially in the public sector.

In my recent visit to America, I was very encouraged by the positive interest and support shown by President Clinton and his Administration and influential members of Congress in supporting the political efforts towards peace of both Governments, and the reform of past injustice and abuses. This assistance, moral and material, is deeply valued and appreciated by the Irish Government.

Both Governments are deeply committed to the search for peace. It is important that our positions and our policies be clearly understood by all and not be misrepresented, and we will continue to clarify them to the best of our ability. For my

part, the appointment of Gordon Wilson to the Senate was intended to endorse and to show to the world the strength of the simple, straightforward desire for peace and reconciliation among the Irish people, and the yearning that the killing might cease. This has a force that can no longer be ignored.

A new formula for peace would create a whole new vista. The opportunities that would open up for all of us in Ireland, once peace were established, are vast. It would provide a far better climate for settling or accommodating the differences that remain. It would bring into the political arena groups and communities that have hitherto felt excluded. A new era awaits us. It is the duty and responsibility of all of us to make sure that it arrives soon. Everyone must respond to the changing mood in the political landscape regarding the North of Ireland.