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Roinn an Taoiseach
Department of the Taoiseach

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cc PST/Mr Finlay
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Alec D Higgins
Joint Secretary
Councillors A-1
Alm Montgomery

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**Agreed position between the
Fine Gael, Progressive Democrats, Democratic Left parties.**

The Leaders of Fine Gael, Progressive Democrats and Democratic Left have met and agreed on the following response to the briefing note on the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation circulated by the Government.

The three parties welcome the changes to the terms of reference made by the Government in response to some of the suggestions made by their parties. In particular we welcome the fact that it is now a fundamental guiding principle of the Forum and of participation in it that all difference relating to all matters will be resolved exclusively by peaceful and democratic means. The parties also welcome the fact that the terms of reference explicitly state that participation in the Forum will be entirely without prejudice to the position on constitutional issues held by any party. These are improvements to the terms of reference which we welcome.

The three parties remain concerned, however, at the possibility that the Forum may be used as a means of seeking renegotiation of the terms of the Downing St. Declaration. We are therefore seeking the addition of the following sentence at the end of the revised draft terms of reference.

"The work of the Forum shall not involve any renegotiation of the terms of the Downing St. Declaration".

The three parties are agreed that the positions on the Forum should be allocated to all parties operating in the island who have a democratic mandate. These positions should be allocated to them, regardless of whether or not they wish to take part in the Forum initially. This would make it clear that their presence in the Forum is welcome, and provided for.

The three parties strongly support the case made by the Alliance Party for an increase in its representation. At this stage, it appears that the Alliance Party is the only party from Northern Ireland that represents an electorate that is not exclusively nationalist. Its voice is therefore of particular importance at the Forum. The three parties believe that the Alliance representation should be increased to three full members, and three alternate members at the very minimum.

The three parties are agreed that there should be some additional recognition of parties that actually have parliamentary representation. On that basis we are agreed that the representation of the Democratic Left should be increased to two full members, with one alternate. We also seek the allocation of an extra alternate member to the Progressive Democrats and to Fine Gael.

The three parties are anxious that the victims of the twenty five years of violence in Northern Ireland should be heard at the Forum. We are seeking assurances that special arrangements will be made to ensure that organisations representing victims, and individual victims, will be heard at the Forum.

The three parties are anxious that the views of the majority community in Northern Ireland should be heard at the Forum by whatever means are possible. In that context we believe that it would be useful for the Forum to seek to establish a formal link with other bodies such as the Northern Ireland Select Committee in Westminster.

The three parties are also concerned to establish whether, as in the case of the New Ireland Forum, the Taoiseach and Tanaiste themselves will be taking part as full members in the Forum as the head of their own parties representation. Unless parties are represented at the Forum at leadership level,

there is a risk of a divergence between the work of the Forum and the ongoing negotiations at inter governmental level, and also at inter party level in Northern Ireland. Any such divergence would be dangerous and counter productive. We are therefore strongly of the opinion that, as in the case of the New Ireland Forum, all parties should be represented in the Forum by their leaders.