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Attention Walter Kirwan:

Note

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Draft of opening
Remarks at Forum
Meeting by Chairperson
(as drafted by himself).

JaC
26.10.94

From: Judge Catherine H. Guinness
To: Mr. Walter Kirwan
Subject: Forum
Date: 26/10/94

cc PST/McFarley
with 24.10.94
Allec O'Leary

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Message: Draft speech attached;
will discuss at lunch-time.

Draft address by Judge Catherine McGuinness, Chairperson, at opening meeting of Forum for Peace and Reconciliation, 28th October 1994.

A Dhaoine Uaisle,

Fógraím An Fóram Síochána agus Athmhuintirís a bheith anois ina shuí. I declare the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation to be now in session.

Tá fáilte roimh gach a bhfuil anseo inniu i gCaisleán stairiúil Átha Cliath. Is iomdha sin eachtra a tháirg sa Chaisleán seo le seacht gcéad agus nócha bliain. Bíodh súil againn ar fad gur dea-obair a dhéanfas an Fóram ar an láthair seo agus go mbeidh cuimhne ar an lá seo, an Aoine an ochtú lá is síchead de Dheireadh Fomhair 1994 mar dháta inar cuireadh tús le feachtas a dhein leas pobal na tíre seo, (thiar, thuaidh, théas agus thoir).

I am happy to welcome all who are here today in Dublin Castle, both participants in the Forum and visitors.

This Forum for Peace and Reconciliation has been established by the Government in accordance with the intentions expressed in the Joint Declaration, to consult on and examine ways in which lasting peace, stability and reconciliation can be established by agreement among all the people of Ireland, and on the steps required to remove barriers of distrust, on the basis of promoting respect for the equal rights and validity of both traditions and identities. In accordance with its terms of reference it will also explore ways in which new approaches can be developed to serve economic interests common to both parts of Ireland.

It will be a fundamental principle of the Forum that all differences relating to the exercise of the right to self-determination of the people of Ireland, and to all other matters, will be resolved exclusively by peaceful and democratic means. The purpose of the Forum will be to provide an opportunity to both major traditions, as well as to others, to assist in identifying and clarifying issues which could most contribute to creating a new era of trust and co-operation. Participation in the Forum will be entirely without prejudice to the position on constitutional issues held by any party.

It is clear that major negotiations regarding Ireland's future, north and south, are now taking place and will continue to take place elsewhere. This Forum is a consultative and advisory body, which I hope will create a background of identification of mutual problems and ~~progress towards~~ mutual understanding and resolution of ~~problems~~ against which those other negotiations may more readily move forward.

The Forum is inclusive in its nature; already it contains members from all of the island of Ireland. I very much hope that in the future other parties and other individuals will feel able to join in our deliberations. The Forum does not represent a threat to any section of the people of Ireland. As I have already said, participation in it is entirely without prejudice to the position on constitutional issues held by any party. The only entry test is a commitment to 'peaceful and democratic means'.

2.

This Forum is about people rather than about territory. It is about people's right to live peacefully on this island 'which we love and for whose welfare we all pray', as that courageous Presbyterian Minister, James Armour of Ballymoney, once said. All who live in Ireland must be made to feel that their right to be here is unquestioned and that they and their traditions are valued, whether they arrived here a few years ago or whether their ancestors came here four thousand years ago or four hundred years ago. People's rights and freedoms should not be affected by their religion, by their political or social outlook, by their economic standing, by their race, or by the country of origin of their ancestors. 'Ireland, as distinct from her people, is nothing to me', said James Connolly in a ringing denunciation of mindless so-called patriotism. James Connolly, who established Ireland's first republican and socialist party, and who was executed following the 1916 Rising, was born in Scotland of Ulster parents, and first arrived in Ireland as a British soldier in the Royal Scots Regiment.

The people of this country have many origins; these strands are woven together to make us what we are. My own personal background is, perhaps, an illustration. My great great grandfather William Ellis was twice Lord Mayor of York in England, in 1799 and 1807. My great grandfather arrived in this country as a soldier in the 93rd Sutherland Highlanders regiment in 1803. He married a Clarewoman whose mother's name was Morony. Their son settled in Spanish Point in Co. Clare, my own father's place of origin. My mother, whose family had both Irish and Scottish ancestors, came from Tullamore in County Offaly. My parents spent virtually their adult life in Dunmurry, near Belfast. I was born into the Belfast Protestant community, a 'child of the Rectory', and spent my childhood there. I in my turn have spent my adult life in Dublin. My love for Ulster is deep-rooted and my Protestant background is strong, but I am nonetheless proud to be a citizen of Ireland.

We are a mixed people, all of us, but we have far more in common than what divides us. Working class people in Dublin have much more in common with working class people, Protestant and Catholic, in Belfast, than they have with some other groups in Dublin. Business and professional people in Cork or Galway have a great deal in common with their counterparts in Lisburn, Omagh and Ballymena. The fact that this is not always appreciated is part of the reason we are here today. We intend to strive to find ways and means for reconciliation and reconstruction among all the people of this island.

To say that this country faces many problems is to understate the position. Some 450,000 are without work; others are underemployed; some are exploited. There is poverty and deprivation in Dublin and in Belfast, in Leitrim and in Tyrone. Poverty and hardship dominate the lives of far too many people in Ireland, Protestant and Catholic, whether their government is in Dublin or in London. Of this we must not lose sight; it is part and parcel of the Irish situation and cannot be ignored. The economic aspects of the work of this Forum are vitally important.

We cannot pretend that the armed conflict of the past 25 years did not happen; nor can we say that it left no legacy. We mourn all those who died; we think of all who were wounded, some of whom will suffer from their injuries all their lives; we grieve for broken families; we are conscious of homes where there are empty chairs; we know that all wars are cruel, bloody, harsh and merciless. We rejoice at the ending of violence. We salute all those who have worked for peace and who ultimately brought about the silence of the guns. Some of those are now members of this Forum; they have earned the thanks and respect of us all.

3.

This Forum is described as a Forum for Peace and Reconciliation. I would almost rather reverse the wording of the title and call it a forum for reconciliation and peace. At present we have a cessation of violence and the beginnings of a peace process, but reconciliation is truly a pre-requisite for a real and lasting peace. If we are to be reconciled we must be able to admit the errors and mistakes of the past; we must be able to express regret for past wrongs. Yet each of us must be able to retain pride and confidence in our history and in our traditions. Reconciliation can grow where there is both honesty and confidence, and where the old fears of each other are put behind us.

Is cinnte gur tír dhaonlathach, tír a mbéadh an chóir anárda atá ó gach duine dá bhfuil sa Fóram seo. Is iomdha leagan amach atá anseo cheana féin agus is suil againn go mbeidh leagain amach eile fós le clos anseo de réir mar a thiocfas gearmanna agus páirtithe eile go Caisleán Bhailé Átha Cliath. Ní contúirt do aon duine nó do aon dream san tír seo ná in aon tír eile an Fóram Síochána agus Athmhuintiris ach a mhialairt ar fad. Ní cur isteach le leagan amach dream ar bith é a bheith anseo linn agus a dtuairim faoi na alíto is fearr chun an tsíocháin a chur, agus a choinneáil, i réim in Éirinn a chur ós coir an Fóram.

Unionist, socialist, republican, nationalist, liberal, conservative and all other views have legitimate rights and should be heard. There is no political test here; there is no censorship; there is openness. No party or group or tradition has a monopoly of wisdom. We hope to help banish hatred, personal abuse and intolerance from the politics of Ireland, and to lead through reconciliation to a true and lasting peace.