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EASTER ADDRESS FROM GERRY ADAMS 7rEmbargoed until 2.30 pm Sunday, 3 April 1994.

A Chairde, I want to extend our solidarity to the families of all the men and women who we gather to honour here today. We salute every generation of Irish patriots and freedom fighters from the 1916 period itself and before and through the decades since then.

We remember also all the unsung heroes and heroines who continue to struggle in the cause of Irish freedom. We think especially of the prisoners and their families, of all our supporters and friends who have kept the faith in this long historic phase of resistance to British interference in Irish affairs.

We gather also to recommit ourselves to the social and economic intent of the 1916 Proclamation and of the Democratic Programme of the 1st Dail. The Republican Plot here in Milltown Cemetery and the County Antrim Memorial are sacred spots for Belfast republicans. All of us have friends buried here. Older generations will recall Rocky Burns or Sear McCaughey and Jimmy Steele. We are all aware of the empty grave reserved for Tom Williams.

Our generation have a particular affinity with this Plot, and Belfast republicans have visited here many times in the last 25 years. So we extend a very special solidarity to the families of the men and women buried here, to the volunteers and the Sinn Fein activists who have fallen in this period of struggle.

I would also like to draw attention to the work of the National Graves Association, to commend their efforts, and to appeal to you all to support the work which they do.

We are Irish republicans. Our vision is for an Irish Republic based on the 1916 Proclamation, non-sexist, independent, free and united. Ni he amhain saor ach gaelach comh maith, ni he amhain gaelach ach saor comh maith. We make no apologies for our politics or for our vision of the future. No more than Pearse did, or Connolly or Maire Drumm or Bobby Sands or Mairead Farrell.

Twenty five years ago the nationalists of the North were an impotent, suppressed and largely apathetic section of the Irish people, locked against our will, without our consent, into this vicious sectarian apartheid state. The British government, as much as the bigotry of unionism, was responsible for this, and successive Dublin governments allowed this unjust situation to continue. There is no avoiding this fact that it was the policies, or lack of policies, of both governments, which contributed so much to the terrible tragedy with which we are now living. That this has started to change, and change it certainly will, has been due to our efforts and to the efforts of others who have committed themselves

to bringing about a lasting peace with justice for all our people of this island.

It is this commitment which has moved the situation on over the last 25 years and especially in the last few years. It was during this period that the contradictions in British strategy came sharply into focus and when the failures of British strategy appeared to be recognised at least by some elements of the British establishment. So it was in December last year that the leaders of these two governments were moved to address republicans directly through the Downing Street Declaration.

This effort to address us is a fundamental shift in policy. Like all other initiatives it marks the failure of every other strategy. It is also a direct response to the developing, and increasingly effective, peace strategy which Sinn Fein publicly launched almost seven years ago and which we are totally committed to bringing to a positive conclusion.

Sinn Fein's peace strategy is now the central plank of party policy. Promoting our peace strategy has involved us in discussions with a wide range of political and religious opinion. The inter-party talks with the SDLP in 1988 were part of that, as were discussions between myself and SDLP party leader John Hume, and our dialogue with the British government.

All of these initiatives arose because of the strength of our struggle, the resilience of our support and the durability and credibility of our analysis.

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Some of them occurred also because we took the initiative and because we had the confidence to engage our opponents in a meaningful way.

Therefore, as we gather here at Easter 1994, it is with a sense of confidence in the strength of our struggle. Of course, this is a period of high risk for us but risk taking is not a new experience for republicans. This is a new phase of struggle. It is a new area of struggle for us.

We have succeeded in putting a new unprecedented focus on the Anglo/Irish conflict and on the core issues involved. All of this has had a major effect internationally and it has opened up a new potential particularly in the USA. Peace in Ireland is now on everyone's political agenda despite the best efforts of some elements to go back to the old failed policies of the past.

So there has been a major shift forward in the struggle for freedom since last Easter. It was at this time last year that news about my talks with John Hume first emerged. Since then, revelation has followed revelation and I'm sure that many of you here today have been surprised at the twists and turns of the situation. You should not be. Our struggle has always had the capacity to act as a catalyst for change in this country. This is so because of your resilience and because of your commitment.

#### The Unionists

We in Sinn Féin have a duty to develop our contacts with the Unionist community. We must recognise, be sympathetic and sensitive to what Unionists are being asked to consider and commit themselves to if a peace dialogue is to develop. We

have stated, over and over again, that we wish to live in peace and without coercion with our unionist neighbours. This must be on a basis of equality.

I am calling on nationalists and republicans to be aware of what it means to be a Unionist as this century draws to a close. I ask the Unionists and the British Government to make an equal effort to recognise the validity of the nationalist experience in Ireland.

I do not seek to minimise the depth of Unionist fears, but, and I would be dishonest not to say it, Unionists must recognise that there is no going back to the failed policies of the past. It is time to look forward not back.

#### The Core Issues

The British may not yet be planning to leave Ireland. But they will. They have been moved considerably and the core issues of their involvement in Irish affairs are being exposed. I am firmly convinced that they can be persuaded to end the Union and to do so in a manner which will permit all of the people of Ireland to come to agreement on a new and stable society on this island. So if these issues are addressed properly (and not least because the British have shifted, at the very least in the rhetoric of their position) then substantial progress is possible.

This is why republicans need not be in a defensive mind-set. We must have confidence in our own ability, in the strength of our argument and in the validity of our cause. We must seek to maintain the political offensive, to promote our peace strategy and to assist in the construction of a proper programme to move us all out of conflict.

IRA Initiative

This is why the IRA initiative announced last Wednesday has been welcomed by Sinn Fein. The British government had created a state-made, a standoff in the peace process. It had erected a roadblock around the issue of clarification. The IRA announcement shows a willingness and flexibility by the IRA leadership. It creates the opportunity for Sinn Fein and the London government to remove the clarification road block so that the peace process can move forward. The significance of the IRA Initiative lies in the potential it creates. This should not be undervalued or under estimated.

There is no logic in the British government's assertion that it is interested in peace in Ireland unless it provides evidence of this concern.

How does it expect to make peace if it seeks to marginalise the people who vote for Sinn Fein? It has already admitted that the IRA cannot be militarily defeated. How does it hope to end the war if it refuses to build a peace process? Is it serious? Mr Major cannot argue that there is a basis for peace unless he can produce and explain what it is.

The Dublin government has been concerned to do this. London, so far, has not. Yet the British government talked with us for 3 years while British Army, Loyalist and IRA activity continued. So what is the logic in holding up the peace process now? How does the London government aim to move forward if it does not deal directly with representatives of our party? Sinn Fein has an electoral mandate. We will not be treated as second class citizens. Sinn Fein will not be treated as a second class party.

The rights of those who support us will be defended by us. No amount of exclusion orders, or censorship or coercion will change this. We have been shot, bombed, imprisoned and demonised. Through it all we have retained our sense of dignity and a willingness to move forward.

We are not concerned to force a public climb down by John Major. We will be flexible. But we will not accept anything less after 25 years of hard, relentless struggle, than the right of our supporters to be treated like all other citizens. We ask for no more or no less.

#### Clarification

The Downing Street Declaration marks a stage in the peace process. It also marks the beginning of what has become a stalemate. Sinn Fein wants to move out of this stalemate and out of this very critical phase. This is why clarification is required.

Negotiation is for a further stage in the process, for London and Dublin and all the other parties including Sinn Fein to negotiate a peace settlement.

So, we have questions to ask of London and we require direct dialogue, not protracted deliberations or negotiations so that answers can be provided to us as they have been to other parties. The areas which require clarification are

- matters of text in what is an ambiguous declaration.
- differences in interpretation and commentary of the declaration
- the steps envisaged to advance the peace process.

If we are being told that Britain has no longer any selfish interest in Ireland, and that the only



problem today is the legacy of the past - the divisions among the people in Ireland - then it is obvious that this division can only be healed by agreement.

In these circumstances, is it not reasonable for democrats to seek from the British government, (given not only its responsibility for that legacy and its authority in the present situation) that it should commit all its resources to heal that division and to promote agreement among our people?

Is it unreasonable to ask the British government what process, time-frame and frame-work it proposes for reaching such agreement? Is it unreasonable to seek to establish Britain's long term intention towards Ireland?

Our request for clarification is to allow us to properly explore what contribution the declaration can make to the overall peace process.

Furthermore, direct dialogue would indicate a genuine interest on the part of the British government in developing a real peace process through the recognition of Sinn Fein's rights as a political party, the validity of our mandate and the democratic integrity of our electorate.

The Dublin government has been concerned to give detailed clarification on its attitude in these matters but both governments need to do this because while Sinn Fein remains committed to building a real peace process, as I have said many times before, we cannot do so without the cooperation of the British government.

The IRA suspension of operations creates the space to permit that government to move forward. None of this will be easy. We are and have been locked into

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conflict and all of the understandable mindsets that it brings - locked minds, locked hearts, locked doors. A complex lock behind which is the precious prize of a lasting peace.

Republicans are only too well aware that 'peace comes dropping slowly'. We know that no single party to the conflict can on its own open the lock to peace but together we can. Together we must find the key which will maintain momentum; provides evidence of intent and develops trust. Republicans will keep trying; we will keep turning each stone. Others must do likewise. A lasting peace demands it.

It will not be achieved by rhetoric or by wishful thinking. We in Sinn Fein know what is required, and we are firmly committed to creating a genuine and lasting peace, founded on democratic principles.

As I have said before, I will not mislead the IRA. Neither will I mislead others about the IRA. The causes of war and conflict must be addressed in an effective manner if a real peace, a sustainable peace, a lasting peace is to be secured. That is the challenge which faces the Irish and the British people today. Every British initiative, military, political or economic to defeat the Irish freedom struggle has failed.

That struggle remains strong vibrant and confident. Some anti-republicans seek an IRA surrender, and leaders of the opposition in Leinster House had the audacity to quote the words of Padraig Pearse against Sinn Fein in a little propaganda ploy. John Bruton, Mary Harney and De Rossa have never been for the peace process. They know that the conflict cannot be ended by an IRA surrender. They also know

that there is no evidence that the IRA is going to surrender.

In 1916, the IRA was forced to surrender. That did not bring peace. The conflict today provides ample tragic evidence of this. So peace must be permanent. There must be a total demilitarisation and an end to all armed actions by all the forces involved, British, loyalist and republican. None of us can legislate for the attitude of future generations. Pádraig Pearse recognised this when he told his court martial:

*"If you strike us down now, we shall rise again and renew the fight. You cannot conquer Ireland. You cannot extinguish the Irish passion for freedom. If our deed has not been sufficient to win freedom then our children will win it by a better deed."*

#### Pathway to Peace

We want to remove that burden from our children. We are going to ensure that they live in a peaceful Ireland. So we must construct a peace settlement which removes all causes of conflict. Republicans want peace. We have a peace strategy, not because we are weak but because we are strong and confident in ourselves and our abilities. We, who have faced down far superior forces for 25 years and are still here, know that we are beyond the consideration of defeat. We can be sure that out there amongst our people are other Bobby Sands, Ethel Lynch's and Mairead Farrell's who will refuse to be broken no matter what the cost.

But we also know that the resolution of this conflict must be worked for through dialogue, consultation, clarification and negotiation.

The Irish peace initiative has brought us all to a cross-roads in our history. We have mapped out the

pathway to peace and we will not be distracted or put off it. We know the route to peace and we will not be prevented from following it by those who have a self-interest in maintaining the divisions which sustain this conflict.

Circumstance alone forced the republican surrender of 1916. But this did not lead to the resolution of the political problems. That conflict broke out again within two years and has continued intermittently ever since.

We want to see conflict in Ireland ended forever. Among other requirements that means no armed actions by any Irish person and the absence of British armed forces.

It means the end of the loyalist death squads. Since 1968, when the South African weapons were brought into Ireland by Brian Nelson, with the knowledge and approval of British Intelligence, 200 people have been killed by loyalist death squads, 178 of these were sectarian killings. This also must be ended.

Peace must be built in a new agreed Ireland. I am confident that this generation of republicans will see the vision of the 1916 Proclamation become reality. It will not be easy but our struggle is strong, confident and will continue for as long as it needs to. We have come through the years of vilification and marginalisation. We are never going back to that. We are moving forward.

This is the clear message this Easter Sunday to all our comrades in struggle and to our opponents. There are no backward steps, no standing still. There is only one way - and that is forward.