



**An Chartlann Náisiúnta**  
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N P Nolan

[Answer by DTA]

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IRA Statement:  
Question and Answers

- Q1 Is the Government satisfied that the IRA's statement represents a complete and permanent cessation of violence?
- A Yes. In reaching its welcome decision, the IRA was well aware that any ceasefire on a more limited basis would not have been sufficient in terms of meeting the desire of the overwhelming majority of the Irish people for a permanent and lasting peace. Nor it would it would have met the terms clearly and consistently set out by the two Governments in respect of full participation in political dialogue on the way ahead.
- Q2 Was the IRA decision based on a secret deal with the Irish or British Governments?
- A There have been no secret deals. The position of both Governments in terms of how they envisage the establishment of a lasting settlement in Ireland was fully set out in the Joint Declaration. At all times and on all occasions we have made clear that both Governments stand foursquare behind the principles of the Declaration and the assurances they provide to both communities in Northern Ireland. Our commitments in that respect are a matter of public record. Unionists and nationalists alike can be assured that there are no secret understandings or hidden dimensions involved in our efforts to promote the cause of peace.

Q3 But Sinn Fein rejected the Declaration at their Letterkenny conference. What changed in the meantime to enable Mr Adams to recommend to the IRA that they end the campaign?

A This is something you will have to take up with Mr Adams. What I am saying to you is that the Government's public and private position on the issue has been dictated totally by the Joint Declaration. We said at the time of the signing of the Declaration that one of its central features was that it definitively removed any last vestige of justification for the use of violence as a means of furthering political ends in Ireland. The framework of the Declaration offers the people of Ireland, whatever their tradition, the basis to agree that from now on their differences can be negotiated exclusively by peaceful, political means. It appears that the new context created by the Declaration has been the subject of intensive debate within the Republican movement. The delay in reaching a decision is less important than the fact that a decision to end violence has now been taken.

Q4 What about reacting to Loyalist violence? Does the IRA regard itself as free to retaliate against Loyalist attacks on Catholics?

A The IRA's statement indicates that what is involved is a total and permanent cessation of violence. There is no doubt a sensitive and delicate process involved in making that a reality. There may be difficulties and setbacks, but the test will be the reality on the ground, and we are hopeful that will bear out the proclaimed intentions of the IRA. At the same time, we will be working

intensively with the British Authorities to ensure that at this delicate time the maximum level of security is provided to vulnerable Nationalist areas. It is our fervent hope, of course, that Loyalist paramilitaries will react positively and constructively to the IRA decision. They have frequently said over the years that their actions were a direct response to IRA violence. Now that the latter has ended, it is the sincere hope of all of us that Loyalist paramilitary activity can also cease, thereby ensuring a comprehensive peace on the island and the safety and security of both communities in Northern Ireland. There is now an unprecedented opportunity for them also to end violence without loss of principle and to opt for the political path.

Q5 What would happen if the IRA were to undertake retaliatory action and thereby contravene the terms of their statement of cessation?

A I do not wish to get into hypothetical questions. Let us judge the reality on the ground, and we are hopeful, with sensitivity and goodwill on all sides, that will reflect the intention to leave violence behind for good. The Irish Government - and no doubt the British Government also - are utterly serious in their determination to seize the historic opportunity that has presented itself to establish a fair and lasting settlement in Ireland. We intend to honour our commitments in this respect and we expect others to do the same. We believe that the Irish people expect and deserve no less.

Q6 How can we trust that the IRA will keep its word and that six, twelve months down the road they wont decide that things are not developing to their liking and resume the

campaign?

A After everything that has happened this past 25 years, the road to reconciliation and mutual trust will inevitably be a long and probably difficult one. I believe the reaction of people on the ground to peace will make it very difficult for anyone to resume violence and plunge Northern Ireland back into conflict. Moreover, we hope this opportunity will be grasped on all sides. Both Governments have made fully and unequivocally clear to the IRA that a declaration of a total and permanent cessation of violence was a necessary first step to the full entry of Sinn Fein into the democratic process. The next steps can now begin. Each step will hopefully also bring with it the gradual increase in trust which Cardinal Daly so rightly identified as crucial to the process. At the same time, it is the hope of all of us that that increase in trust and mutual understanding will also gradually render the danger of a return to old ways and old fears redundant.

Q7 But what guarantees do you have?

A The best guarantee against a relapse into violence is the force of opinion of the Irish people in favour of peace. The people of Ireland have made clear again and again that what they desire more than anything is peace. Now that that goal is at last firmly in sight, they will insist that it should never again be put in jeopardy. It is the task and responsibility of all of us entrusted with leadership at this time to ensure that the will of the Irish people in this respect is fully met.



Q8 What happens now?

A We must now begin the task of building on the historic opportunity that has presented itself. The Joint Declaration stipulates that in the event of a permanent end to paramilitary violence, "democratically mandated parties" are free to participate fully in democratic politics and to join in dialogue in due course between the Governments and the political parties on the way ahead. The British Government have stipulated, including in their response of 19 May to Sinn Fein questions, a certain time scale within which, and how, such a process would take place in their respect. On foot of the IRA statement, we now expect that process to begin. We believe we must build on the announcement and maintain the momentum towards comprehensive negotiations on a lasting settlement.

Q9 Will the Forum now take place and when?

A Insofar as the Irish Government are concerned, it was indicated in the Joint Declaration that we would make our own arrangements within this jurisdiction to enable democratic parties to consult together and share in dialogue about the political future. A specific option referred to in this regard by the Taoiseach was the possibility of establishing a Forum for Peace and Reconciliation, in consultation with other parties, to make recommendations on ways in which agreement and trust between both traditions in Ireland could be promoted and established. That option remains open. The Government will now quickly commence consultations with the other parties on how these matters can best be pursued, and how a possible Forum could best contribute to the momentum

towards negotiations which we wish to see.

The Forum was initially envisaged at the time of the signing of the Joint Declaration as providing an early opportunity for such dialogue in the absence of wider political talks. In view of developments since then, including the intensive discussions which have been taking place between the two Governments aimed at fashioning a basis for such talks, we must now carefully consider how the consultations between the democratic parties can best be structured in advance of wider talks.

Q10 There have been frequent references to demilitarisation. In the Irish Government's view, what steps should the British Government now take to achieve this?

A We have always held that the ending of violence would transform the situation on the ground in Northern Ireland and would, over time, open the way for a comprehensive re-assessment by the British Government of their security policies and practices. The British Authorities themselves have made clear in recent months that they are thinking very much along similar lines. It is a matter of common sense that security dispositions can be reduced proportionately as the threat is reduced. We would now expect that the first steps in this direction will rapidly be taken. Sensitive handling of these delicate issues will be of the utmost importance to reinforce and consolidate the new situation.

Q11 Do you envisage such measures as a reduction in security force levels in Nationalist areas etc?

A These are matters in the first instance for the British Government and I do not believe that it would be appropriate or useful to go into detail on specific measures. I would repeat that we believe that the ending of violence will transform the context in which these matters are approached and decided, and that an ending of violence has obvious and positive consequences in terms of security needs.

Q12. Earlier this year the Tánaiste spoke of the need for a verifiable handing over of arms as an essential part of the cessation of violence. What is now the Government's position on this?

A. The essential point is that there is now a clear commitment on the part of the IRA to refrain permanently from the use of violence for political ends. There is also clarity all around on the ultimate objective: It is to remove not only the gun, but all traces of the gun, from Irish politics, North and South. That is obviously a long process. The growth of trust from small steps will we hope enable bigger steps to be taken on all sides. Some issues are more "downstream" than others. The important thing is that steady progress is made in good faith towards the ultimate objective.

Q13 What will be the effect of the IRA statement on the talks process and on the current negotiations between the two Governments?

A It has been the Government's consistent view that the prospects for the successful conclusion of talks would be greatly enhanced in an atmosphere of peace. We must all now redouble our efforts to ensure that the historic



opportunity offered by a cessation of IRA violence be taken. There is a heavy obligation on all constitutional politicians to demonstrate that democratic methods can bring about that lasting accommodation we all seek.

Likewise, the two Governments, which have for several months been working on a framework document to put to the parties as the basis for new talks, are determined to bring their work to an early conclusion and to ensure that talks resume as soon as possible. This development does not alter the basic principles of either Government, or their views on where a balanced accommodation honourable to both sides can be found. It increases very significantly the prospects of success by enabling the talks to take place on an inclusive basis and against a background of peace.

Q14. Will Sinn Féin be able to take part in those talks?

A The Joint Declaration made clear that all democratically mandated parties which establish a commitment to exclusively peaceful methods and which have shown that they abide by the democratic process, are free to participate fully in democratic politics and to join in dialogue in due course between the Governments and the political parties on the way ahead. In a relatively short period of time it should be possible to confirm that Sinn Féin now satisfies those criteria and can participate in talks on the basis of its democratic mandate.

Q15. Unionists have declared that treachery, a hidden agenda aimed at coercing them into a united Ireland, lies behind this IRA statement. What reassurance can they expect from the Irish Government?

A First of all, we recognise that the Unionist community, which has suffered much in the violence of the past twenty-five years, is understandably suspicious and nervous of change. We also recognise that the building of trust and reconciliation, which form the only basis on which we in this island can build a shared future, will be a slow and painstaking process. It could not be otherwise. Nevertheless, the Unionist community will, I hope, heed those who are urging a calm and reasoned approach. The reality is that the Irish Government, both in the Anglo-Irish Agreement and in the Joint Declaration, have fully and solemnly accepted that any change in the status of Northern Ireland would only come about with the consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland, and that it would be wrong to attempt to impose a united Ireland in the absence of the freely given consent of a majority. There is no hidden dimension or secret agreement underlying the Governments' involvement in the peace process. The guarantees we have given to both communities in the Joint Declaration. Unionists have nothing to fear from peace, nothing to fear from dialogue. Their rights and identity are fully respected by the Irish Government. No accommodation can succeed without them. We want to have a chance to reiterate this to them face-to-face. We have an opportunity once and for all to escape from the zero-sum mentality which has bedevilled us for so long. Peace is in everybody's interests and nobody will lose from it. Unionists in turn have a duty to seize the opportunity on offer.

Q16. Is the Government aware of any plans for massive economic support from the United States or the EU to underpin a

peace settlement.

A Peace will create immense new opportunities for both parts of the island, and for economic co-operation between them. The dynamic effects on the Northern Ireland economy in particular should be great, not just in obvious sectors like tourism but in terms of releasing a new spirit of optimism and creativity. In the process of economic reconstruction and regeneration, assistance from overseas, whether from the United States, our partners in the EU, or elsewhere will be of great value - as it already has been through the aegis of the International Fund for Ireland. We will be seeking very actively to encourage such assistance at every level.

Q17. Gerry Adams's statement of 29 August laid great stress on the need to address the issues which concern nationalists on the ground within Northern Ireland, such as discrimination and disadvantage. How will this agenda be addressed in the coming months?

A The Irish Government have long recognised the close connection which exists between issues of this sort, the campaign of violence and political progress. Much has already been done through the mechanisms of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, but we accept that still more remains to be done. New opportunities for remedying continuing inequalities between the two communities will be offered by a peaceful environment and we are confident that the British Government too fully understands the importance of urgent progress on this front. More broadly, in political talks we will be working to ensure that the new institutions to be agreed will be explicitly based on and committed to the concepts of equality of treatment and

parity of esteem. You will not get stability in any situation where there are second-class citizens, or second-class communities, for that matter. I think that is recognised by both Governments.

Q18. Where does the goal of a united Ireland now stand in the wake of the IRA ceasefire?

A. A united Ireland which fully respects the rights and traditions of both communities within Ireland remains the aspiration of a majority of the people on the island, and of a substantial part of the population within Northern Ireland. Successive Governments have long accepted that unity could only come about on the basis of the freely-given consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland. That remains our view. A quarter century of violence has polarised and embittered the two communities within Northern Ireland. The Unionist sense of insecurity and hostility to the prospect of a united Ireland has undoubtedly intensified as a result. A healing process is needed through the building of trust and reconciliation between the two traditions. In the short term, however, our focus must be on the creation of new institutions which will fully reflect the key relationships involved, both on this island and between Ireland and Britain, and will allow for the fair and durable accommodation we all seek.

Q19. Why has the IRA decided at this time to call a permanent halt to its campaign?

A. That is a question only they can answer. One must presume, however, that a number of broad factors have been of importance. First of all, the clear and



unequivocal preference of the vast majority of the Irish people for dialogue and for reliance on exclusively peaceful means, and their overwhelming condemnation of violence. Secondly, the determination of the two Governments to stand together in full support of the balanced and democratic principles set out in the Joint Declaration. Thirdly, the courageous determination of many leaders of the nationalist community, notably John Hume, to build bridges and to convince them by argument and example that the political road is the only one to follow. The key role played by President Clinton and his Administration, by our long-standing friends in Congress and by leading figures in the Irish-American community must also be acknowledged. The constructive part played by the leadership of Sinn Fein in leading the Republican movement out of the cul-de-sac of violence and into the mainstream of democratic politics has also been decisive.

Q. 20 Will the two Governments now be able to reach agreement on the amendment of the Government of Ireland Act and of Articles 2 & 3?

A. Irrespective of the IRA's announcement, it has long been the position of the Irish Government that a lasting settlement requires a number of elements in an agreed package:

- (1) a balanced accommodation of the differing positions of the two main traditions on constitutional issues
- (2) structures which would bridge divisions and promote reconciliation between the unionist and nationalist traditions
- (3) arrangements for enhanced cooperation between the two parts of Ireland.



The precise form of such a package is a matter for negotiation between the Governments and the political parties. We would hope that a process of negotiation would begin as soon as possible on the basis of a Framework Document on which the two Governments are currently working and which we hope to complete in a matter of weeks. These policies and objectives exist independently of the position taken by Sinn Féin. It is of course true that the prospects for achieving an accommodation will be greatly enhanced by a process of inclusive negotiations against a background of peace.

Q. 21 Doesn't this IRA statement suggest that terrorism has been rewarded?

A. No. There has been no reward for terrorism. The Joint Declaration removed any final shred of justification for the use of violence by the IRA, and offered it and Sinn Féin an honourable way out of the morass without any infringement of the fundamental democratic principles which underpin the Declaration. The Irish people have made it consistently clear that they see no place in today's Ireland for the gun and the bomb. I believe that republicans have come to appreciate that it is only through inclusion in the political process that they can legitimately seek to advance their objectives.

Q. 22 Is this in fact a surrender by the IRA?

A. It is a victory for all the people of Ireland, North and South. The IRA has had an undoubted capacity for destruction. Violence has, however, proved entirely

futile and counterproductive and I think that the leaderships of Sinn Féin and the IRA have come to appreciate this fact. An honourable way has now been created for them to participate in mainstream politics armed only with the force of their arguments and the strength of their democratic mandate.

Q. 23 Do you now fear a loyalist backlash?

A. Obviously there is a danger that some loyalist paramilitaries will seek to destabilise the situation, in the mistaken belief that somehow peace represents a threat to them. On the contrary: all the people of Northern Ireland can surely feel immense relief and joy at the prospect of an end to the killing which has blighted their lives for so long. We are encouraged by the calm and responsible approach being urged by many leading Unionist politicians and Protestant churchmen. They rightly point out that the Unionist community can and should rely on the absolute assurances of both governments that they need fear no coercion and that the principle of consent will at all times be fully respected. I would repeat that there have been no sell-outs, no underhand deals, no hidden agendas. We have been at pains to emphasise this to our many contacts in Northern Ireland and I believe that the message is getting through. I would repeat: peace threatens no-one and benefits everyone. The important thing now is that we all seize the historic opportunity to create, for the first time, an honourable and fair accommodation between the two traditions in our land.