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STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER ON NORTHERN IRELAND ON 16 SEPTEMBER

I have come to Northern Ireland today to talk directly to the people.

More than two weeks have now passed without IRA violence. This is very good news. The longer it lasts, the more hopes will rise that we may have an unparalleled opportunity for progress. But I know also, in this fast moving situation, that many people in Northern Ireland still have suspicions and doubts. They are worried and uncertain. Are the IRA sincere? What will the Government do? These are the questions in people's minds. It is for the IRA themselves to demonstrate that they are sincere.

I want now to make the Government's position clear.

Our first objective has always been to secure a permanent end to all paramilitary violence. By the Downing Street Declaration we created, with the Irish Government, the conditions to achieve that objective, and we welcome the cessation of PIRA violence which would not have occurred without it.

This cessation of violence has not been bought. No price has been paid for it. The principle guiding us remains that of democratic consent. Our commitment to the constitutional guarantee remains absolute. There have been no secret deals made directly or

indirectly, no secret assurances given, no nods, no winks, no tricks with mirrors. And most importantly after 25 years of bloodshed and terror, we have not lowered our guard.

The approach we have taken is scrupulously fair to both sides of the community in Northern Ireland; seeks to recognise their legitimate aspirations; and does not favour one side or the other. I dearly want to see peace firmly established on all sides. But I need to be certain of the commitment to it of the IRA and Sinn Fein.

I am now going to build on the encouraging progress of the last two weeks and to chart the way forward. I have these points to make.

First, we need to be able to assume sensibly that Sinn Fein and the IRA are now genuinely committed to end violence permanently. This is because neither we nor the main constitutional parties can sit down at the table with them to negotiate under even the possibility of a threat.

Have the IRA now given up violence for good? Only they can know, of course, for it is their own true intentions that will decide the matter. With the responsibility that we as the Government carry for the well-being of all the people of Northern Ireland, we have only got their words and their actions to go on. So we have looked at these very carefully.

They have made statements which point in the right direction. We need to know from their words and their actions that this is a firm and unequivocal decision. They are nearly there. I hope they will have the courage to remove ambiguities and make the clear statement everyone wishes to hear.

We shall therefore go on scrutinising both words and actions until - as we hope - we can sensibly make the assumption that the IRA truly intend to end violence for good. Within three peaceful months of that, we shall be able to take part with Sinn Fein in the exploratory dialogue to which we are committed.

My second point concerns the outcome of the three-stranded political talks.

The aim of these talks is to reach agreement on new political arrangements within Northern Ireland, and on the future relationships between the two parts of the island and between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland.

It is vital that we should move forward with the widespread consent and confidence of the people of Northern Ireland. They, and the parties engaged in the talks, want to be sure that the outcome will not be imposed upon them without their democratic consent. There will be siren voices telling them they will be tricked. I want to tell them that they will not be tricked.

I intend to fulfil the commitment - made with the agreement of the parties by Peter Brooke when he launched the talks in 1991 - to ensure that their outcome was acceptable to the people.

So for the avoidance of any doubt, I want to make clear today that the Government will submit the final outcome of the three stranded process of talks to the electorate in Northern Ireland for approval in a referendum. That is to say, we shall consult the people of the Province on the full package of proposals as a whole. The details of such a referendum will rightly be for discussion with the parties.

Let me say to all the people of Northern Ireland: the referendum means that it will be your choice whether to accept the outcome. My commitment means that no one can go behind your backs. Not today. Not tomorrow. Not at any time. You can forget this talk of secret deals. It will be for you to decide.

I have already said that I am still looking for a clearer indication that the IRA's violence is over for good. But it is not only their violence that has scarred the life of Northern Ireland. INLA and the Loyalist paramilitaries should also end their campaigns. There is no shred of justification for it. The Loyalists should make good their earlier statements that their violence would end when IRA violence was halted. They should now respond to the many appeals to them from political, church and community leaders.

This brings me to my third point.

The broadcasting restrictions were brought in to stop supporters of terrorist organisations from using television and radio to justify violence.

I believe the restrictions are no longer serving the purpose for which they were intended. Ways have been found to circumvent them. But, most importantly, we are now in very different circumstances from those of 1988, when the restrictions came in.

The Government has therefore decided that the broadcasting restrictions will now be lifted. The Secretary of State for National Heritage is taking the necessary steps to bring this into effect immediately.

All paramilitaries, and those who speak on their behalf, now have an opportunity. The opportunity to tell us directly, not under the cover of an actor's voice, that they are truly committed to peaceful methods only, and to there being no resumption of violence in the future.

Let them tell the people of the United Kingdom, loud and clear, face to face, that their commitment to end violence is genuine and lasting. They should do this without delay if they want to show that they are at last ready to enter the democratic process.

AN RÚNAÍOCHT ANGLA-ÉIREANNACH
SEALFEIRSTE

Handwritten notes:
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FOR: Layina Collins/Embassy London
DATE: 16 September, 1994

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Questions and Answers with Prime Minister Major
BBC Radio Ulster, 16 September 1994

PM Major: I will take a very few questions and then I suspect both you and I have other things to do.

Reporter: the lifting of the restrictions, is that effective immediately?

PM Major: It's effective as of this minute.

Reporter: Are you confident that what you have said in terms of the referendum will actually lead or convince the loyalist

is emphatically not a political decision. It was taken on the advice of the Chief Constable and endorsed by the Secretary of State. That is what has happened on this occasion. As for lifting the broadcasting ban, I set out the reasons for that

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and I think they were quite clear. Next question.

Reporter: Prime Minister, you're basically then challenging Sinn Fein to go on the airwaves and come out with some sequence of words then. Is that right?

PM Major: I want them to make clear what they have been intimating is the case, that they have ended violence for good. I wish them to do that. They can choose their own words: I don't insist on using the words that I myself have used in the past. I just need to know from Sinn Fein that the ceasefire that has taken place is going to continue, come what may, and that there will be no return to violence. Sinn Fein can put it in any words they like, provided it is unambiguous.

Reporter: Prime Minister, are you concerned that no matter what you say to the loyalists they simply will not believe you?

PM Major: Well, we'll have to wait and see, won't we? They now have a cast iron guarantee. Next question.

Reporter: Prime Minister, when will the framework document - and you talk about putting it to a referendum - when will that framework, that formula be ready?

PM Major: Not the framework document - the framework document feeds into the political talks. What I propose to put to a referendum is the outcome of the political talks. There is some misunderstanding about the framework document. Some people have portrayed the framework document when it is concluded - and we will proceed with it as speedily as possible - they have portrayed it as though it were a blueprint. It is emphatically not a blueprint. When the framework document has been produced it will be fed into the talks between the political parties. The talks between the political parties will, I trust, reach a conclusion. When that outcome is clear, we will put the outcome of the talks to the people in a referendum.

Reporter: Your timetable?

PM Major: I can't have a timetable, can I? I can't be certain how long it will be before I am satisfied that the ending of violence is permanent. I don't then know when I can enter - when officials can enter - into preliminary discussions about how to get Sinn Fein into the political talks. Even when we enter into it, I don't know how long that will take. And even when we enter into the political talks, I can't be certain at this stage how long those political talks will take. So with the best will in the world I can't put a time frame on it.

Gerry Heilly (Irish Times): Will there be a parallel referendum south of the border when this final package is concluded?

PM Major: It's not a matter for me. I'm responsible for north of the border; I've no knowledge whatsoever of what might happen south of the border. The referendum that I am talking about is a referendum of the people of Northern Ireland, north of the border.

Reporter: Is the Government still looking for the IRA to surrender all weapons and explosives?

PM Major: We've made it clear we see no justification for people to have weapons and explosives once it has been declared that the ceasefire is genuine. These are matters we will have to discuss in the talks about talks when we are able to engage in them.

Reporter: Prime Minister, could I just ask you sir, is for party political reasons, as some people suspect, that you haven't embraced this cessation of so-called military operations in totality? You seem to be engaged in what one politician described as strip-tease acceptance of the ceasefire. What is your problem in terms of embracing it in its totality?

PM Major: I've set it out time and time again: as soon as I'm clear that this is a ceasefire that isn't temporary, then we can begin to proceed. But nothing that has been said yet states unambiguously that in no circumstances whatsoever would violence commence again. Now I need to be certain about that. At the moment, after 14 days of no ceasefire, great progress has been made towards actually saying that, but it has not yet been stated unambiguously. If that is the case, let it be stated unambiguously. Go and ask Sinn Fein directly yourself: are there any circumstances in which you would take up violence again, or are there no circumstances. Let them tell us: there are no circumstances. They can use their own words, yes.

Reporter: Albert Reynolds said yesterday that the IRA ceasefire was for good. Are you therefore at odds with the Irish Prime Minister over this?

PM Major: We must both make our judgements. I'm responsible for Northern Ireland where people have had bloodshed and murder for 25 years. People need to be certain that this is for good, not that it's some temporary ceasefire that can commence again. It isn't a practicable proposition for the constitutional parties and the Government to sit down and talk to Sinn Fein until they are certain that if they disagree Sinn Fein are not going to get up from the table and say: right, we haven't got our way, therefore we'll go back to violence. But once we know from their words and their actions, once we are satisfied that that is the case, we can move forward.

Reporter: No danger of a rift then between yourself and Dublin?

PM Major: There's no danger whatsoever.

Reporter: A while earlier you said that you wanted to hear from Sinn Fein whether or not the IRA's going to cease violence in no circumstances. Surely Martin McGuinness has already said that there'll be no violence in all circumstances?

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PM Major: For all time? I haven't heard him say "in all circumstances for all time". If he had said "in all circumstances for all time" he would have made an advance. He said "in all circumstances". For how long? This week, next week, one month, two months, six months? He didn't tell us. I need to know it's for good, that nothing will turn them off it, that nothing will change their mind. In all circumstances for all time. That is what I need to hear. I'll take one more.

Reporter: In terms of Sinn Fein's entry into the talks process, you say that once you're convince that the IRA have renounced violence for good and all that t _ clock then starts ticking.

(**PM Major:** That's correct.) Does that i: er that in a way that Sinn Fein have a veto or can elongate his whole process or will it keep going to a point in time wi re the other parties present a package for the referenda ?

PM Major: I'm not trying to do anything other than commence progress at the earliest possible date. The commencement of the three-month period within which we can begin to have talks about talks with Sinn Fein - the date at which that starts is in Sinn Fein's hands. If they are able to say for me tonight: we have ended violence, not just for a short time, but in all circumstances and for all time, then the clock can start ticking before midnight. Thank you very much indeed.

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