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parades to
celebrate or
parades.
John Bruton

**Press Statement from Lower Ormeau Concerned Community, the
Garvaghy Road Residents' Coalition and the Bogside Residents' Group,
17th July 1996**

We have come to Dublin today to ask the Government and political leaders of the Republic of Ireland to take a proactive and assertive role in support of the legitimate rights and aspirations of Northern nationalists. We welcome the statements that have already been made by the Taoiseach John Bruton and others and we wish to express our thanks for the many messages of sympathy and support which we have received during the past week.

On Thursday 11th of July the British Government abdicated its responsibility to ensure justice and equality for all in the North of Ireland when it capitulated to the violence and intimidation of the Orange Order. The decision to allow the previously banned journey along the Garvaghy Road contravened, as the Taoiseach has said, the basic tenets of democracy and justice. The violent actions by the RUC against the people of the Garvaghy Road, the unlawful imprisonment of the Lower Ormeau residents for over 27 hours and the massive force subsequently directed against protesters in Derry, Belfast and elsewhere - all these actions were in stark contrast to the "softly, softly" approach adopted by the RUC in dealing with loyalists during the four and half days of the stand-off at Drumcree and related loyalists protests elsewhere. That four and a half days saw one Catholic murdered and many people injured, intimidated and burned out of their homes. Property was destroyed and travel by road, rail, sea and air was seriously impeded by masked thugs. In that time 662 plastic bullets were fired by the RUC. In the two and a half days following Thursday's parade along the Garvaghy Road, 5340 plastic bullets were fired at Catholics during street protests in nationalist areas.

While we are entirely opposed to the use of plastic bullets against either loyalists or nationalists, these statistics are an indication of the disgracefully partisan way in which the RUC policed last week's incidents. The sectarian force is now totally discredited in nationalist eyes and there is now an almost universal nationalist demand that the RUC be disbanded and replaced with a police force capable of serving all of the community.

The belated British Government response to all this has been the announcement of a review body on parades. We have no confidence in this ill-defined review body and we believe that it is ridiculous for the British Government to reassess policy in relation to parades when we have a police force which is incapable of implementing any policy, from whatever source, in the face of Orange opposition. It would have been much more appropriate to have announced an independent, internationally-based public enquiry into the total breakdown of law and order last week and the failure of the RUC to act with even a semblance of impartiality.

The British Government has also attempted to portray the events of last week as arising from the refusal of two parties to enter into dialogue, with the residents and the Orange Order being equally entrenched and equally threatening. That is an absolute lie. Over the last year we have made many attempts to open dialogue with the Orange Order, and have been rebuffed at all times. That is a matter of public record and the British Government is well aware of it. We have also committed ourselves to peaceful protest at all times and the events of the last year have borne that out. It is also appropriate to restate our belief in and support for the right to march. What we simply ask is that march routes are sensitive to

demographic change. Where marches cause offence we believe that it is incumbent on march organisers to negotiate consent with the representatives of local residents.

Given the failure of the British Government to protect nationalists and the complete unacceptability of the RUC to nationalists, we believe that it is now time for the Irish Government to take active measures to internationalise the Northern Ireland situation. The current presidency of the EU gives the Irish Government an excellent opportunity to seek the support of our European partners. One simple suggestion which we would make in the immediate term is to have EU observers in place during contentious parades. We hope to use our series of meetings today to pursue a number of approaches aimed at developing policies and structures which will allow a just and peaceful resolution of the problem of contentious sectarian parades.

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