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Reference Code: 2021/98/21

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Madam Speaker, I now wish to turn to Northern Ireland.

Earlier this year, this House passed legislation to allow elections in Northern Ireland as the basis for multi-party talks. The process brought great hope.

No-one imagined rapid breakthroughs. This is a democratic process, and it sometimes does grind along very slowly.

The IRA and Sinn Fein do not accept this democratic process. They are trying to impose their own terms on the talks. They have not been ready to renounce violence.

That is plainly incompatible with joining the talks. They have excluded themselves from the talks by their return to violence. Not us, not the Irish, not other parties in Northern Ireland. It's their fault. No one else's.

The talks will go on without them.

The IRA and Sinn Fein should be under no illusion that they can join the process until they have demonstrated real commitment to democratic and non-violent methods.

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So even if a new ceasefire is declared, there will have to be more than soft words to convince this Government - and I believe this House - that it does not represent another tactical device, to be abandoned at any convenient moment.

For our part, we'll go on improving the process of government in Northern Ireland.

Firstly we'll be consulting on how to develop the Northern Ireland Grand Committee to enable greater scrutiny of legislative proposals, of Government policy and of Ministers.

We'll also introduce a Bill to allow the decommissioning of terrorist weapons. To encourage the removal of these weapons from the streets, we will be asking the House to agree that forensic evidence should not be sought from them.

But let me be clear - there can be no general amnesty for terrorist crimes and there will be none.

Madam Speaker, I can't look into the minds of the terrorists and predict what they will do. But I do know that the road to a settlement will not be easy.

But we can do all in our power to promote a lasting peace and protect the community from their actions. And we will.

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To: Anglo-Irish Division
Press
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Date: 23 October 1996

Fax Nr.:

Pages: 2, including this cover sheet.

From: Helen Blake

Subject: Debate on Queen's Speech - Prime Minister's comments

COMMENTS:

Towards the end of his contribution to the debate on the Queen's speech the Prime Minister made the following comments on Northern Ireland:

'Earlier this year the House passed legislation to allow elections in Northern Ireland as the basis for multi-party talks. That process brought great hope. No one, I think, imagined rapid breakthroughs, this is a democratic process and I think we all expected that it would grind along exceedingly slowly. The IRA and Sinn Féin do not accept this democratic process. They are trying to impose their own terms on the talks. They have not been ready to renounce violence. That is plainly incompatible with joining the talks. They have excluded themselves by their return to violence. It is not us, not the British Government, not the Irish Government, not the other parties in Northern Ireland. It is their fault that they are excluded from talks and nobody else's. But the talks will continue without them.

Note
The IRA and Sinn Féin should be under no illusions that they can join the process until they have demonstrated real commitment to democratic and non-violent methods. So even if a new ceasefire is declared, there will have to be more than soft-words to convince the government and, I believe, this House that it does not represent another tactical device to be abandoned at any convenient moment.

For our part, we intend to go on improving the process of government in Northern Ireland. Firstly we will be consulting on how to develop the Northern Ireland Grand Committee to enable greater scrutiny of legislative proposals, of government policy and of course of ministers.

We also intend to introduce a Bill to allow the decommissioning of terrorist weapons. To encourage the removal of these weapons from the streets we will be asking the House to

agree that forensic evidence should not be sought from them. But let me be clear, there can be no general amnesty for terrorist crimes and there will be none.

Madam Speaker, I can't look into the minds of the terrorists and predict what they will do. But I do know that the road to a settlement will not be easy. We will do all in our power to promote a lasting peace and to protect the community from their actions. That is our promise and I both hope and expect the full support from this House in that endeavour.