

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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Government Statement

on

Garvaghy Road Situation

The Government are gravely concerned at the events on the Garvaghy Road today. The abrupt reversal of the decision about the route of the Orange parade is regretted. It runs entirely counter to the previously agreed approaches by both Governments to accord parity of esteem to both the nationalist and unionist communities. We have consistently maintained that the right to march must be exercised with due regard for the rights of local communities to enjoy protection against unwanted marches, and that marches should not take place in an area or along a route where they are not welcome.

The Government have been in close touch with events in Northern Ireland over the past week in particular, in the hope that the potential confrontations of the marching season could be defused.

We were aware of and supported the efforts being made at the local level and with assistance from Church leaders to find an acceptable conclusion to the Garvaghy Road situation. We are not aware of a reason why this dialogue was not pursued to the required acceptable outcome.

The Government are fully conscious of the anger which today's decision has caused to the nationalist community in Northern Ireland. We would appeal to all concerned to show the utmost restraint at this time. Restraint is the most effective of arguments in current circumstances.

We have already conveyed to the British Government at the highest level our concern at this development, which we believe underlines more strongly than ever the need for a clear set of rules which once and for all reconciles the right to march with the no less important rights of communities to avoid hostile or unwelcome marches being visited on them.

Today's development will not deflect us from our efforts, through the multi-party talks and otherwise, to find a basis for an acceptable political settlement which will accommodate the wishes and aspirations of all.

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PR Dennee

Government Statement on the Orange Parade in Portadown

The Government have learned with deep disappointment of the decision in relation to the routing of the Orange Parade in Portadown and have left the British Government in no doubt about our serious concern for its implications.

The Government have sought to give every support to the efforts of Dr Mowlam and many others to promote dialogue and local accommodation which would avoid repeating last year's débâcle. We regret that our hopes for an agreed or acceptable solution on this occasion have been disappointed.

The Government understand the strong feelings which the decision to allow an Orange parade on the Garvaghy Road will arouse among the residents and in the wider nationalist community, but in the difficult period ahead all concerned on both sides must act with dignity and restraint.

These ongoing difficulties underline the urgency of working out agreed ground rules and a code of practice for parades to ensure that conflicting rights are reconciled through dialogue and reasonable compromise. Above all, we must not allow this decision to deflect us from the search for peace. We must redouble our efforts to achieve a political solution which will ensure full respect for the identities of both traditions and replace conflict with dialogue and accommodation.

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