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AMBASÁID NA hÉIREANN
TELEPHONE: (202) 462-3939
FAX: (202) 232-5993

EMBASSY OF IRELAND
2234 MASSACHUSETTS AVE., N.W.
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20008

**FAX**

DATE: 14 MARCH 1997

FOR: SECRETARY O HUIGINN

FROM: PAT HENNESSY

**SPEECH BY SENATOR KENNEDY**

Please find attached a speech to be delivered in New York this evening. There is a strict embargo until 1 pm EST. Our message of last evening refers.

**END**

**TOTAL PAGES: (6)**

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from the office of

# Senator Edward M. Kennedy

of Massachusetts

**STATEMENT OF SENATOR EDWARD M. KENNEDY**
**ON RECEIVING IRISH AMERICAN OF THE YEAR AWARD**
**FROM IRISH AMERICA MAGAZINE**
**NEW YORK CITY**
**MARCH 14, 1997**

Embargoed until delivery (7:30 p.m. est)
Check against delivery

Contact: Jim Manley
212-224-2633

I want to thank John Hume for those generous words. John is an extraordinarily able leader for the people of Northern Ireland. I've known him for 25 years, and I have enormous respect for his ability and dedication. He's been tireless in recent months in the effort to restore the cease-fire, and I support him completely. John Hume is a statesman of the highest order, and peace is closer in Northern Ireland today because of him. President Kennedy would have called him a Profile in Courage. It's no secret that I've nominated him for the Nobel Peace Prize, and no one deserves it more than John Hume.

John also has a beautiful singing voice. If you haven't heard him sing "The Town I Love So Well," you've missed a wonderful part of our Irish heritage.

I want to thank Niall O'Dowd and everyone associated with Irish America Magazine for this honor. In addition to being an outstanding journalist and publisher, Niall has played an important role in the search for peace in Northern Ireland. In my book, he's an Irish American of the Year too, and it's an honor to pay tribute to him this evening.

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I also commend the Editor-in-Chief, the woman who has brilliantly succeeded in making this magazine the "first-ever" successful magazine about Irish America, Patricia Harty.

I know one other person who would have loved the current issue of Irish America -- my grandfather John Fitzgerald. And I want to thank the Boston law firm of Campbell, Campbell and Edwards for their spectacular advertisement with his picture on page 38 -- Grampa would have loved it, and so do I.

In a more serious vein, I want to say a few words this evening about the cause that is very close to all our hearts on St. Patrick's Day 1997 -- the cause of peace in Northern Ireland. Because of leaders like John Hume, we've come closer than ever to peace in the past two years. We thought we had the breakthrough we needed, when the cease-fire was declared on all sides in 1994, first by the IRA and followed after that by the Loyalist paramilitary organizations.

One of the key steps -- perhaps the key step -- in achieving the IRA cease-fire was the visa given to Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams to visit the United States in January 1994. Granting the visa was a courageous decision by President Clinton, who understood the importance of taking a risk for peace. And the American who first recognized that opportunity also deserves great credit -- Ambassador Jean Kennedy Smith.

The end of the cease-fire after 17 months and the return to violence by the IRA was an enormous setback that all of us condemned and continue to condemn. But peace is still tantalizingly within reach. A unique opportunity now exists to grasp it once again, if leaders on all sides have the wisdom and the will to do so.

So I want to take the occasion this evening to issue two specific challenges -- one to the IRA, and the other to the British leaders as the British election approaches.

First, I urge Prime Minister John Major and Labour Party Leader Tony Blair to make a clear statement that if the IRA restores its cease-fire, then Sinn Fein will be admitted to the peace talks on

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Northern Ireland when the talks resume on the date which is now scheduled -- the third of June, with no further preconditions.

Those talks, as you know, are being held under the chairmanship of George Mitchell, and he's done an outstanding job in the most difficult of circumstances. George Mitchell is proof, if any proof is needed, that Irish America can be even-handed and will be even-handed in dealing with both sides of the community in Northern Ireland -- Unionist and Nationalist, Protestant and Catholic.

Second, I urge the IRA to restore its cease-fire -- unequivocally, immediately, and unconditionally -- based on the firm commitments that should be made now by John Major and Tony Blair, that regardless of who is the next British Prime Minister, that Sinn Fein will be admitted into the peace talks when they resume in June.

There are twelve weeks between now and the time when the talks are scheduled to resume. Many observers feel, appropriately, that in light of the broken cease-fire, there must be a reasonable period of time to test the good faith of any new cease-fire before Sinn Fein is admitted to any talks.

Perhaps it is Irish luck -- Northern Irish luck -- that the circumstances of a suspension of the talks is taking place for the British election. Nevertheless, that fortuitous circumstance gives ample time -- twelve ample weeks -- to test the bona fides of a new cease-fire before the talks resume. It is in the highest interest of all who truly want peace to act, and act now.

I continue to believe that the 17-month IRA cease-fire, which began in August 1994 and ended in February 1996, was genuine. I know that it is now fashionable for some to say that the cease-fire wasn't authentic, that it was a sham. But that revisionism comes with ill grace from those in high places who do not want to admit or accept their responsibility for failing to respond to the cease-fire. I reply to them -- how can anyone say with a straight face that 17 months of peace was a sham?

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When the cease-fire was declared in 1994, it was declared with the clear understanding that, if it held, Sinn Fein would be brought into peace talks.

But instead of convening talks within a reasonable period of time after the cease-fire was announced, the British Government and the Unionists erected barrier after barrier -- pre-condition after pre-condition -- to Sinn Fein's participation in any talks.

Decommissioning, as it's called, was the most significant of the pre-conditions -- the surrender by the IRA of at least some arms and weapons. But decommissioning wasn't part of the ground rules when the cease-fire was being considered and declared. It was injected later, as a new condition by those who didn't want Sinn Fein to join any talks.

Decommissioning is also a phony issue, because the IRA and the Loyalist paramilitaries can each disarm today and rearm tomorrow. In fact, there is no situation in the world in which such groups have handed in weapons in advance of a peaceful settlement. It didn't happen in South Africa. It didn't happen in El Salvador. It isn't happening in the Middle East. And it won't happen in Northern Ireland.

George Mitchell did recommend a constructive possible alternative. He suggested that the parties at least consider a compromise under which some decommissioning would take place while the talks proceeded. It is a good suggestion which should be discussed in the context of the talks. But Senator Mitchell did not make it a pre-condition for joining the talks, and it would be wrong to make it a pre-condition.

We can all cite a list of positive confidence-building measures that were taken by the British Government during the cease-fire. And they were significant measures. But the most important thing that was promised, that was indispensable, was dispensed with. For 17 months -- 17 months -- there were no peace talks. And after 17 months, there was no peace. Those who left Sinn Fein to twist in the wind share the responsibility for the return to violence, but they have an unusual chance now to take an important redeeming step.

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A rare opportunity is at hand to restore the cease-fire, to expand the talks to include all the parties, and to salvage the peace process. Sinn Fein, the IRA, and British leaders know what they should do, and I urge them to do it. And if they do so, we in Irish America will do all we can to help them succeed.

Again, I am deeply grateful for the honor you have given to me this evening. Many of you here deserve this award just as much. We are proud of the great heritage and history we share, and we intend to hold it high in all the years ahead.

Thank you very much.

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