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Statement by the Taoiseach, Mr. John Bruton

I welcome Prime Minister Tony Blair's reiteration of the central importance of the principle of consent, and his commitment to pursue a settlement which can command the support of both nationalists and unionists.

As he said, the settlement train is leaving, and we want everyone on the train. But, as the Prime Minister said and I agree, the train is leaving anyway.

The Irish Government's policy of contact with Sinn Féin is that there will be no routine contact, but that a meeting may be organised with officials to discuss matters that might lead to an imminent ceasefire.

We are looking for a whole-hearted renunciation of force, and of threats of force. Only then can we have a fair political settlement, one that lasts because it is based on the will and the consent of the people.

ENDS

16 May 1997

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Sinn Féin

...news release/nuacht ráiteas...

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16th May 1997

Sinn Féin Responds to Blair

Sinn Féin's Chief Negotiator Martin McGuinness MP responding to today's speech by the British Prime Minister Tony Blair said "Many nationalists will be disappointed by the pro-unionist emphasis in Mr Blair's speech."

Mr. McGuinness said:

"The opportunity for peace created in 1994 was squandered by the Major government.

"The recent election results have rekindled public hope and expectation of progress. The overall objective must be to remove the causes of conflict and establish a just and lasting peace.

"Sinn Féin's focus for some time has been on the restoration of the peace process by ensuring that a meaningful and inclusive process of negotiations is genuinely on offer.

"Of course in any negotiations Sinn Féin will represent and promote the Irish Republican analysis."

Concerning Mr. Blair's reference to a meeting with government officials Mr. McGuinness said:

"Our renewed democratic mandate demands that we be involved in dialogue on the same basis as all other parties.

"While asserting our democratic rights and that of our electorate, we will take every opportunity, particularly with the two governments to address the core issues central to the creation of a meaningful and inclusive process of peace negotiations." ENDS

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