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Taoiseach empathises with grief and suffering of victims of violence, and pledges Government support

Wednesday 13 May 1998

I welcome the publication today of "We Will Remember Them", Sir Kenneth Bloomfield's report on the victims of violence, who are inclusively defined as "the surviving injured and those who care for them, together with those close relatives who mourn their dead." The report is a comprehensive, sensitive and cogent analysis of what is both a profoundly important, and a profoundly emotional, set of issues. Sir Kenneth is to be congratulated for having performed a most valuable public service with great skill and wisdom.

The report, which is based on extensive contact with victims themselves, mostly in Northern Ireland but also in this jurisdiction and in Britain, makes a wide range of imaginative recommendations. While recognising both the significance and the complexity of commemoration, it places particular priority on the provision of meaningful practical support.

The Government will study the report in detail and look carefully at the recommendations it makes. We will consult widely, including with the British Government and the new institutions to be established under the Good Friday Agreement, on how we might best offer appropriate support to whatever new arrangements and schemes are put in place. Following this consultation, we will be making a significant financial contribution; in this regard, we will give particular consideration to the proposed Trust Fund for young people and the children of victims. But I know that no words or deeds can truly compensate people for their long years of suffering or can heal the traumas which remain a living reality for many thousands of victims.

In one sense, it is clear from the report that the grief and suffering experienced by victims transcends all differences between them in terms of their backgrounds and beliefs; in

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another sense, it is clear that each case is unique, and that there can be no predicted or prescribed way to come to terms with loss and pain. The equal reality and validity of each individual experience must be fully respected.

It is clear from the report that many victims of violence feel isolated and ignored. On behalf of successive Irish Governments, I acknowledge that this feeling is shared by victims in our jurisdiction, including of the Dublin and Monaghan bombings. The Government will also, in consultation with them, consider what further steps should be taken to address their particular needs.

This time of hope is also for some a particularly painful one. It is apparent that certain aspects of the Good Friday Agreement, in particular those relating to the release of prisoners, cause some victims very substantial difficulties. I hope they can come to share the view that the Agreement opens up the prospect of a new and peaceful beginning in all our relationships, and that, in the words of the Agreement, "the achievement of a peaceful and just society would be a true memorial to the victims of violence."

There is an obligation on those of us in a position of political leadership, and on the wider public, to be particularly sensitive to the needs and feelings of victims. We also have the moral duty to do all that we can to ensure that never again will violence destroy lives, families and communities. My firm view is that the Agreement is fair and balanced and that it offers all of the people of Ireland, North and South, a unique opportunity to begin the task of building reconciliation and mutual respect. That is why it is so important that it is resoundingly endorsed in both parts of the island on 22 May, and that the new institutions to be established win the active support of both traditions.

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