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Question No. 54

To ask the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he will provide details of the Government's plans to financially support a new fund to aid victims of paramilitary violence in Northern Ireland.

-John Bruton.

For ORAL answer on Thursday, 28th May, 1998.

Ref No: 12030/98

Reply

The Government are very much aware of the suffering endured by the victims of violence arising from the conflict in Northern Ireland. The Good Friday Agreement dedicates a section to these victims of violence. It is based on recognition of the concerns and difficulties facing victims of violence and their families, as well as of the fact that for many their suffering remains a painful and living reality today. The Agreement acknowledges that the provision of services which are supportive and sensitive to the needs of victims will be a critical element in the process of reconciliation and recognises the need for the allocation of sufficient resources to this end.

The Taoiseach warmly welcomed the publication, on 13 May, of the Report of the Northern Ireland Victims Commission, which he described as a "comprehensive, sensitive and cogent analysis of what is both a profoundly important, and a profoundly emotional set of issues". The Government are at present studying in detail the Report and its wide-ranging and imaginative recommendations which emphasise, in particular, the need for practical assistance to be made available to the victims. We will consult widely, including with the British Government and the new institutions to be established under the Agreement, on how we might offer appropriate support to whatever arrangements and schemes are put in place. As the Taoiseach said in his statement, following this consultation we will be making a significant financial contribution. In this regard, particular consideration will be given to the proposed Trust Fund focussed on compensating the children of victims for social and/or educational disadvantage suffered by reason of the death or serious injury of a parent through violence.

The Government have authorised my colleague, the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, to conduct a review of the services and arrangements in place to meet the needs of

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victims in this jurisdiction and to identify what further measures need to be taken. The former Tánaiste, Mr John Wilson, has accepted the Minister's invitation to carry out this important task on behalf of the Government.

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