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Press Release

Statement by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, David Andrews, T.D. on the British Government response to the New Material about Bloody Sunday

I warmly welcome today's announcement by Prime Minister Blair that the British Government is to establish a tribunal of inquiry to consider the new material which has emerged regarding the events of Bloody Sunday. In doing so, I am particularly pleased for the relatives of those who were killed. This has been a long journey for them; their sense of deep grief was always compounded by the great sense of injustice represented by the Widgery Report.

I met with representatives of the relatives very recently and assured them of the Taoiseach's and the Government's full support for a new inquiry into the tragic events of 30 January 1972. I would like to pay tribute today, on the eve of the 26th anniversary of Bloody Sunday, to the commitment and dedicated work of the relatives group over so many years.

The Taoiseach has authorised the publication today of the Government's Assessment of the new material handed over to the British Government in June 1997. We believe that it is important that this detailed assessment of new material be put on the record.

I look forward to the Tribunal completing its work in a timely fashion, and finally and fully establishing the truth about the tragic events of Bloody Sunday.

Press Office
29 January 1998

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Bloody Sunday: The British Government's Announcement of a new Inquiry and the Irish Government's Publication of its Assessment of the New Material

Statement by the Taoiseach, Mr Bertie Ahern, T.D.

On behalf of the Irish Government, I welcome today's announcement by the British Government, in response to the Irish Government's Assessment of the New Material about Bloody Sunday. I have authorised publication of this Assessment today.

On the eve of the 26th anniversary of Bloody Sunday, the Government welcome the announcement of the intention to establish a new, independent judicial Tribunal of Inquiry. This is what has been sought consistently by the Government and its predecessor and, of course, by the victims and relatives of victims of Bloody Sunday. Such an inquiry was called for publicly by me, as recently as Friday last, 23 January, in the course of my visit to Derry, where I met the victims and relatives and fulfilled a promise to lay a wreath at the Bloody Sunday memorial.

It was also what was sought by me, and by the Minister for Foreign Affairs in our intensive contacts with the British Prime Minister and with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland since we took office. I want to thank Tony Blair and pay tribute to him for the way in which he took a strong personal interest and involvement in this matter, leading to today's very welcome announcement.

I also wish to pay tribute to the steadfast commitment of the Bloody Sunday victims and relatives and to their unstinting efforts, over so many years, to establish the truth of what happened on Bloody Sunday. I have met them on many occasions, both before and since taking office and have always been impressed by the dignity and determination with which they have pursued the cause of truth, in the face of grief, loss, injustice and the burden of the

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unresolved nature of the issue. I very much hope that the new Inquiry will lead to a situation in which they can, while never forgetting their lost loved ones, put the events of that terrible day behind them and get on with their lives.

I am very conscious of the pain and the grief of the many other victims, whether injured or bereaved, of all the different incidents of violence throughout the troubles. I fully endorse what my predecessor said in sending the Government's Assessment to the British Prime Minister - that the Government are deeply conscious of, and sympathise profoundly with, the loss, suffering and grief of all victims of violence throughout these islands and their family and wider circles.

I have decided that it is appropriate that the Government's Assessment of the New Material should be published now, in parallel with the British announcement, since the Assessment played such an important part in bringing about today's decision. It is published now, not in any spirit of recrimination, but as something that is owed to the victims and relatives of the victims and in line with the Government's conviction that truth and justice in regard to the events of Bloody Sunday can serve the objectives of peace, stability and reconciliation, towards which the present process of multi-party negotiations is directed.

I pledge that the Government I lead will continue to devote all its energies to the search, in the current talks process, for a settlement that will ensure that never again will any family have to bear the burden of grief and loss that has been borne by the relatives of the victims of Bloody Sunday, as by so many other families throughout these islands.

ENDS

29 January 1998

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