

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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Oifig an Taoisigh
Office of the Taoiseach

10 February, 1998

Mr David Trimble, MP,
Ulster Unionist Council,
3 Glengall Street,
Belfast BT125AE

Dear David,

I refer to your letter of 30 January, 1998. I have noted carefully the points that you made.

I am very conscious of the pain and grief of the very many other victims of all the terrible incidents of violence on these islands. However, the Irish Government - and indeed many others - have always maintained that Bloody Sunday was different because, not only did the victims of Bloody Sunday suffer their fate at the hands of those whose duty it was to respect as well as uphold the rule of law, but they also suffered the additional injustice of the Widgery Report, which tainted the reputations of the innocent victims and covered up the true facts as to what occurred.

I know that it may not be easy for the many members of the Unionist community whose relatives and close friends have been killed by the Provisional IRA and others to accept the particular focus on Bloody Sunday, given the many victims of other atrocities. In my statement on 29 January, following Prime Minister Blair's announcement, I indicated that I was very conscious of the pain and the grief of the many victims, whether injured or bereaved, of all the different incidents of violence throughout the troubles; and that I fully endorsed 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. The Irish Government are very conscious that any agreed settlement to emerge from the multi-party negotiations will have to deal as satisfactorily as possible with the concerns of all the victims of violence and their families, representatives of whom I hope to meet soon. Moreover, it has been

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recognised by both Belfast and London newspapers tending to Unionist viewpoints that a new, true account of what happened on Bloody Sunday need not be at the expense of any of the other victims of violence.

With regard to an inquiry into the matters you raise, these issues were brought to the attention of the then Taoiseach, Mr Jack Lynch, at the time, and he dealt with them expeditiously. In fact, far from covering up the issue, he exposed the facts of the case in the most public way possible. In the event, four Government Ministers ceased to hold office and certain individuals were brought to trial in the courts, following a police investigation. These matters were also extensively investigated by the Public Accounts Committee of the Dáil. I consider that this matter was sufficiently aired at the time and that there is no basis for reopening it, having regard, in particular, to the policy followed by the then Government from the outset of the Troubles and by successive Irish Governments continuously thereafter. Fianna Fáil policy, from the foundation of the Provisional IRA, was to combat its campaign of violence and to co-operate closely to that end with the security authorities in Northern Ireland. Anyone who did not agree with that policy had to leave the Party, and some did so.

There is absolutely no evidence to suggest that the Irish Government decided to subvent the Provisional IRA, or in any way encouraged its formation or a campaign of violence in renewal of previous campaigns up to 1962 that had been vigorously suppressed by Irish Governments. This is also the conclusion of many historians who have examined such allegations relating to the origins of the Provisional IRA. On the contrary, the Government of that time, and all successive Irish Governments, have done everything in their power to combat the Provisional IRA and any other paramilitary organisations. To this end, a whole plethora of measures were taken, beginning with those introduced by the Government led by Mr Lynch, such as the establishment of the Special Criminal Court and the banning of the political representatives of Provisional Sinn Féin from the airwaves. These vigorous measures showed the determination of the Irish Government to combat the Provisional IRA, and in this they reflected the absence at that time and the continuing absence ,of any significant support for the Provisional IRA in this jurisdiction.

This is not to say that there was not very real concern in this jurisdiction in 1969/70 as to how best to deal with the pleas expressed by all sections of the Nationalist

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community in Northern Ireland for effective protection against attacks on that community. As is well recorded, the Government, in the light of various initiatives suggested, decided to act only with the utmost prudence. Indeed, it is quite disingenuous to suggest that the Irish Government is responsible for the creation and growth of the Provisional IRA which, essentially, arose from events and factors internal to Northern Ireland. The Irish Government believe that through a new Inquiry and the establishment of the truth about Bloody Sunday, there can be a new hope and confidence by the nationalist people of Northern Ireland that they will receive fair and equal treatment and that their concerns will be listened to and receive an equitable response. I believe that in the search for agreement between all of the people of this island, such confidence is essential. I very much welcome the response of the British Government to the Irish Government's Assessment of the new material about the events of Bloody Sunday and I believe that it is in everyone's interest that such an Inquiry is taking place.

I do not accept that the policy or actions of any Irish Government in regard to Provisional IRA violence have given any grounds for distrust in respect of the Government's attitude to terrorism. On the contrary, in contrast to the general opinion in regard to Bloody Sunday, I believe that the great majority of people in Northern Ireland who oppose terrorism from whatever source recognise that throughout the troubles, the Irish Government have always implemented a strong and effective policy to prevent and counter such terrorism. Accordingly, I cannot see that any useful purpose would be served by establishing or re-opening an inquiry such as you propose.

Yours sincerely

Taoiseach

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