

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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David Trimble's Statement on Doorsteps of Castle Buildings, Tuesday 2 July 1999

David Trimble: As others have done I wish to start off by expressing our thanks and appreciation to the Prime Minister and to the Taoiseach. We have been amazed at the time that they have been prepared to devote to this issue and the energy with which they have pursued this over the last week. It really is a terrible reflection on the circumstances that it has required that degree of effort from people with such considerable responsibilities. I also want to say a particular word of thanks to General de Chastelain and to his colleagues and those who read and study the report that they have made today will see that the confidence that we have had in their integrity and their independence has been justified in terms of that report. It is a pity that the report has so little in terms of progress to report. The intensive negotiations that we've had, the talks that we've had over the course of the last week do reflect the importance of the issue that we are dealing with. I know to some people the question of paramilitary arms and decommissioning is a symbolic issue but it is not just that, it is.... a vitally important issue. Democracy cannot co-exist with terrorism, it cannot co-exist with private armies. This issue is its heart about maintaining the democratic process, its about decommissioning arms, not decommissioning democracy. That is why we consider that the Prime Minister was so right in his approach to concentrate on the issues of certainty, of commitment and of providing guarantees. And the question of commitment - and this can only be a commitment by paramilitaries because it is only the paramilitaries and the parties related to them that have the arms to be decommissioned - so it is a question of the commitment of those parties and of course because it is the largest paramilitary organisation and the only one likely to be in an administration in the near future, there is a tendency to concentrate on Sinn Féin. But questions arise with regard to other parties as well. But on the point of Sinn Féin we still have not received any commitment that would be recognised by Unionists. The paper that we finally saw last night and which was published overnight still is aspirational just as the Agreement was aspirational so it too. It's just aspirational. It says that they believe they could persuade and when we saw them we said you should change the could to a will or a must. That was the only change we asked of them and that's in their declaration and they went out and said that we had rejected their declaration but we just asked them to change one word. Mind you, it's a word that would have changed them from being aspirational to a commitment. So what happened was that they

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refused to give a commitment. They had a supplementary paper as well, it contained a timetable or hinted at a timetable. Mind you we weren't impressed by the timetable but we're even less impressed by the fact that when they published their papers they omitted the timetable. So again there's question marks with regard to commitment there. With regard to issues of certainty and guarantees there are problems there too. We consider that the certainty is not there sufficiently, that the guarantees are weak. Yes there are safeguards, there's a recognition by the Government of a need for safeguards. What the safeguard offered is a cure just as bad as a disease. We need to see the detail on this, we need to see the legislation, we need to be able to study it and there are other matters that we need to study with as well. Now always in matters of this nature there are aspects of the arrangements which involve in the phrase equal pain for all parties and there is in this matters which cause us pain. Aspects of the proposals are outside our current party policy, are outside the terms of the manifesto that we stood on, and outside the manifesto some people may say only for five or six weeks but outside the manifesto on what is a highly emotive point and an emotive point that encapsulates an important principle. Furthermore we have to say that these proposals are in a sense fundamentally unfair, they are unfair in that they equate democrats and terrorists and treat them as if they were the same. It's the same unfair presentation of this issue over the last week, that it was an issue between Sinn Féin and the Ulster Unionist Party. I was not, it was an issue between democracy and private armies and that's an issue that should have involved other parties as we, and the failure of some other parties to stand by democracy on this is a serious reflection on them and that reflection is not just that those comments are not just directed towards the SDLP, they are also directed towards those Unionist parties that proclaim themselves to be ardent defenders of democracy but are conspicuously absent when it comes to do some serious work on the issue as well. We consider that it is unfair particularly that if the terrorists default on their obligations in this, then the pain is suffered upon the penalty is suffered upon the democrats and indeed they would suffer as much if not more than those in default. I think there is a fundamental imbalance there. I recall the last time the Prime Minister came to Northern Ireland to try and resolve this issue at Hillsborough around Easter. I recall also after that that Sinn Féin unambiguously rejected those proposals. After that rejection Sinn Féin was given time and space and policy was changed. And I'll say that constructive Unionists deserve just as much time and just as much consideration. Now I have expressed several doubts about these proposals. There will be those who say that those doubts are best not in the factors I mention but because we are opposed to partnership. But that is not true, that is not true, we are more than ready to work in partnership with Catholics and Nationalists and Republicans and it proved that time and again in the course of the last few years, not just at Stormont but elsewhere in Northern Ireland as well. Over

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this last year and in particular we have worked closely with the SDLP and I have forged close relationships as a result with many in the SDLP and I do want to acknowledge all that we have done together in the course of this last year, in difficult times and the fact that we have handled those difficult issues over this last year augurs well for the future when we get to it. I have also to say that we are ready to work with Sinn Féin, we are ready to work with them if they commit themselves to peace and democracy and they know it. I know that they go around casting reflection on this commitment but they know that what they say is not true and particularly the leadership of Sinn Féin knows that and it is to that leadership that I wish to address a few words, a few words to Mr. Adams and Mr McGuinness. If there is any threat to this process at the moment it is because of your delay over the course of the last fourteen months. If you want to in the fourteen days the Prime Ministers allowed for the next move to see it progress further then you can if you move in the course of those days, build confidence in your intentions, build confidence in your conversion from terrorism to democracy, and I hope you do. In any event let me say that whatever disappointments we may have today I intend to keep trying and I will. I want to see this work. I want to see an inclusive Assembly succeed. I want above all to maintain the integrity of the democratic process.

Ends

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