

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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Speaking points for the Taoiseach's meeting with Dr. Ian Paisley on Thursday, 30 September, at 3.30pm

- I would like to welcome you, Dr Paisley, the Ministers of your Church and representatives of your congregation to Government Buildings.

- I am appalled that attacks should be carried out on your church or any church. We must, all of us, do what we can to ensure that attacks on any Church property anywhere simply never happen.

- I know that the Gardaí have said that they believe that these attacks were carried out by vandals and that you are not convinced that this was the case. It may be that these were sectarian attacks. I have asked the guards to be especially vigilant in protecting church property in the Monaghan area. I know that the Garda mobile patrols and the Gardaí on outdoor duty have been fully briefed to ensure that special attention is paid to vulnerable places of worship.

- I am conscious that there was also a recent attack on Church of Ireland property. This meeting will have served a very useful function in highlighting the issue and I am glad to have the opportunity to condemn and deplore such attacks.

- The amount of damage caused to your church in Monaghan was very significant (£100,000). If there is anything we can do, we would be only too glad to help.

- This meeting also gives us the opportunity to condemn attacks on Church property of all denominations, Catholic Churches, Orange halls and other church property in Northern Ireland - Churches in Lisburn and Carrickfergus have been particular targets. I know, of course, that you have always condemned violence, from all

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quarters.

- In the Good Friday Agreement we affirmed our commitment to the civil rights and religious liberty of everyone in the community and the parties affirmed, in particular, the right to freedom and expression of religion.

- This issue of freedom of worship is, of course, relevant to the island as a whole. I would be interested to hear your views, Dr Paisley, on what we can all do, Church leaders and politicians, to combat sectarianism. In recent months there have been appalling sectarian attacks in Co. Antrim, (Catholics in Larne and Carrickfergus have been subjected to an ongoing loyalist campaign of intimidation and violence) and protests which focused on church property were particularly deplorable. I believe there is an onus on all of us in positions of leadership in the churches and in politics to promote mutual respect and tolerance.

- [It has been suggested that Dr Paisley might raise the question of transmission of broadcasts by the United Christian Broadcasters Ltd. This matter is under discussion by the IRTC and the Office of the Director of Telecommunications Regulation (there is some confusion about where responsibilities lie and how best to proceed). If raised, the Taoiseach could indicate that the relevant agencies are examining the issue. At face value, it would appear that applications for radio broadcasting licences should be subject to some element of content based scrutiny. As a principle, we want to ensure that offensive material is not broadcast, so some scrutiny is necessary. But the Taoiseach could indicate that he will have the matter looked into.]

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59

Decline of Protestant Population

If Dr. Paisley raises the issue of the decline of the Protestant population since the foundation of the State, the Taoiseach could say that this issue was considered at some length by the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation and the Forum produced a book 'Building Trust in Ireland' which addresses the issue in a balanced and objective manner.

The Taoiseach should begin with a statement of principles, that Ireland today is a pluralist democracy, with a written Constitution that provides for separation of Church and State, though welcoming the positive contribution of all Churches. All parties would deplore and condemn without reservation sectarian attacks or indeed vandalism against Churches of any denomination. Everyone, North and South, has a right to freedom from any form of sectarian harassment. Religious buildings and their congregations should be regarded as sacrosanct.

The following points are also relevant :

- The Protestant population of the 26 counties has been in decline since at least the mid-19th century. The number of Presbyterians for example declined from 66,000 in 1861 to 45,000 in 1911. The political revolution in Ireland, which left Southern Unionists on the losing side, undoubtedly contributed to a substantial fall between 1911 and 1926. As against that, in the immediate post-independence period, the Protestant population still to a significant extent dominated economic life, continuing to own substantial agriculture land and

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many of the country's leading businesses. Individuals held prominent public positions. For the most part, communities are completely integrated these days, regardless of what Church individuals may go to.

- While the State was scrupulous in its dealings with minorities and went to considerable lengths to ensure that minority institutions, such as schools and hospitals, would be viable, there is no doubt that partition left many members of the minority feeling vulnerable and isolated, especially in border areas. The First World War, emigration and the fact, that partly as a historical reaction, the Protestant tradition was not valued to begin with as much as it should have been, were all factors. We are trying to redress the balance. There was also natural emigration to towns and cities, with some from the Southern Ulster counties migrating North. We have now reversed the terrible haemorrhage of emigration and are more interested in people's expertise than their religious affiliation. Many Ulster Protestants are making good careers in the South. Last year, we recognised the sacrifice of those who gave their lives in the First World War, Catholic and Protestant - through support for the Peace Park at Messines.

- In the 1960s and 1970s, as interdenominational barriers came down, strictly enforced mixed marriage regulations also took a toll for a time, though today arrangements between the Churches are far more pragmatic.

- It used to be far more the case, in the 1920s and 1930s, that perceived treatment of the minority in the North had some repercussions in the South. By and large, and certainly outside perhaps certain stretches along the immediate border area, that link was broken in the more recent Troubles. People do not

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associate Protestants in the South, who are loyal and committed Irish citizens, with the politics of most of their co-religionists in the North.

- Since the early 1980s, the Protestant population in the South has largely stabilised. The nature of our society is changing rapidly, and has become more pluralist and multi-cultural. The economic prosperity of recent years has brought an increase in confidence that applies to all sectors across the economy. I believe that any divisions that existed at the foundation of the State have largely broken down, and there is a genuine sense of equality of opportunity for everyone.

- If there are security problems for any religious minority in certain border areas, we are more than willing to look at them. About a year ago, the Taoiseach met a deputation of councillors from the border counties, who had widely different experiences.

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