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PRESS RELEASE

STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER OF NORTHERN IRELAND
(RT HON BRIAN FAULKNER)

Yesterday at Westminster, in the course of a very important debate on Northern Ireland, Mr Harold Wilson made a speech in which he put forward a detailed and complex set of proposals for what has come to be known as a "Political solution".

This is a moment for all of us who exercise responsibility in this situation to try to understand the views of others, and even where we disagree to seek in them points of contact and greater understanding. No one has a monopoly of wisdom. We must be ready to listen to anyone who speaks out of a genuine concern.

That is why I want my comments to be carefully weighed but also realistic and I will therefore confine myself to making two fundamental points. First as a matter of fact that the majority of people in Northern Ireland are determined to remain citizens of the United Kingdom. It is absolutely basic to my principles as a Unionist that the position of Northern Ireland as an integral part of the United Kingdom must not be weakened in any way. Secondly as a matter of both common sense and justice, that no fundamental change unacceptable to the majority can be made. This was the basis of the guarantee given by Mr Attlee's government in 1949 and subsequently endorsed by all successive United Kingdom governments of both parties.

Whatever the future may hold the immediate need in Northern Ireland is first to end violence, not for any negative reason but above all to create conditions in which co-operation between the communities will be possible. I am glad that Mr Wilson recognises this.

Beyond that, if we can develop between Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom and the Irish Republic constructive and useful co-operation that can only be to the good of everyone in all parts of Ireland. If all of us in the British Isles draw closer together within the context of the European Community I for one will welcome it.

But these developments can only come from confidence and mutual trust, first of all between the communities in Northern Ireland and then more generally. Our relationships will have to be regulated in a new spirit of understanding and good will.

We do not ask people to shed their ultimate aspirations but simply to recognise current realities.

26 November 1971