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STATEMENT FROM THE NORTHERN IRELAND EXECUTIVE

Tomorrow, January 1, we assume responsibility for government in Northern Ireland.

In the days ahead, as we take control of the Departments of Government, and meet the Assembly to which we will be responsible, we will have much to say in detail about our plans.

Today, right from the start, we want to state clearly how we intend Northern Ireland to be governed.

We have undertaken to serve in the interests of Northern Ireland and all of its people. That is the spirit in which we shall always act, both individually and collectively.

We want the New Year to see the beginning not just of a new system of government, but of a new spirit. Let 1974 be the Year of Reconciliation.

We will be guided by respect for fundamental human rights: the right to work, the right to a decent home, the right above all to live in peace and freedom.

In the name of this community which has suffered so much, we call upon those organisations which have been pursuing political ends by violent means to stop the killing. There is no mandate for such acts; no constructive ends to be achieved by them.

We know that there are those who are sincerely opposed to the course we are taking. To them we would say this: we cannot prevent you from excluding yourselves from the peaceful development of our community, if that is indeed your wish. But it is not our wish that you should do so; indeed we would deplore it.

This Executive, a broadly-based coalition of interests, is prepared at any time to sit down for constructive discussions with other interests. There is, indeed, opportunity for a further widening of this administration if others truly wish to share the burdens of government with us. And if, instead, they choose to take the course of constructive opposition, that too is an important element in any democratic system.

We intend to listen with care and concern to every member of the Assembly and those they represent. All that we ask is that those who oppose us should also recognise the need for reconciliation. Violent words and violent actions do a disservice to a people who long for peace.

We do not expect everyone to support us; but we believe that the overwhelming majority of people in Northern Ireland want to see us managing our own affairs once again, and will be prepared to judge us by what we do.

31 December 1973