



NORTHERN IRELAND Information Service

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FAREWELL STATEMENT BY RT HON TOM KING, SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

As you know, the Prime Minister has asked me to become Secretary of State for Defence. That means that on Friday I cease to be Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. As today is my last day in the Province, I wanted to speak directly to you before I went.

First, I wanted you to know that I go with a real sense of sadness. In spite of all the pressure and disappointments, and experiences at times of great tragedy and suffering that I have seen, I have always been conscious as well of all the kindness and goodness that there is in the Province - and of the courage and determination of people to work for a better future.

Let me say a word first about terrorism. Terrorism cannot win - we know that - and twenty years on the terrorists must know that too. No matter what the new weapons or devices or explosives, the terrorists cannot prevail - the courage and skill of the security forces and the very spirit of the community itself will ensure that. Terrorism must be beaten, and sectarian hatred and intimidation as well. Don't be frightened to hold out the hand of friendship to others without always fearing that they'll take advantage of you, or that others will condemn you. Don't let the bullies shout you down. Those that live in the past won't help you with the future. And the future can be so good for Northern Ireland.

Some people seem to feel the need to apologise for Northern Ireland. I have never felt the need to apologise for the real Northern Ireland, hardworking and good-humoured as it is. We have our problems, yes, but we have massive strengths as well. In the economy I see the best chance ever for many, many more people to have jobs. When I came here four years ago, the picture was really depressing, with unemployment rising steadily and I was warned that it would only get worse. Four years later, unemployment's falling sharply. We have had the best year ever for new investment in the Province, new foreign investors, major new office and shop developments with a growing sense of confidence in Belfast, in Londonderry, in so many places in Northern Ireland where people tell me how the atmosphere has changed so much for the better.

'Making Belfast Work', 'Making Londonderry Work', 'Making Northern Ireland Work' are not just slogans, they are actually starting to happen.

Two years ago, both Harland's and Shorts were facing real crises. Now, I hope both those challenges have been met, and I believe that their future can be really exciting as well.

Of course, that is not guaranteed and it will depend on everybody in both companies being determined to play their part to make sure that it happens. But that's true for everything in Northern Ireland. There can't be a guarantee of a better future, but there's certainly an excellent chance of one if everybody really works for it.

The great disappointment is that we have not yet made more progress on the political side. The longer I have had the wide powers that a Secretary of State exercises, the more it's convinced me that people in the Province and elected in the Province should take a greater share of those powers and responsibilities. I believe that at last politicians in Northern Ireland are starting to think seriously about these issues, and I really hope there can now be significant progress.

However, I am ceasing now to be directly responsible for Northern Ireland, but of course I shall still have a very keen interest in the Province as Secretary of State for Defence and I look forward to working closely with Peter Brooke, the new Secretary of State. He has been a very close colleague over a number of years in Government and I am delighted at his appointment and I know how hard he will work for all the people of Northern Ireland. I will give him all the support that I can and I offer to him and to you all my good wishes for that brighter future that is there to be worked for and can really be won.