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FROM: JOANNE MAXWELL
ANGLO-IRISH SECRETARIAT
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- cc PS/Mr Murphy (B&L)
- PS/Mr Ingram (B&L)
- PS/PUS (B&L)
- PS/Mr Semple
- Mr Thomas
- Mr Steele
- Mr Bell
- Mr Daniell
- Mr Leach
- Mr Stephens
- Mr Shannon
- Mr Watkins
- Mr Beeton
- Mr Brooker
- Mrs Brown
- Mrs Collins
- Mr Hill
- Mr Perry
- Mr Maccabe
- Mr Smyth
- Mr Whysall
- HMA, Dublin
- Mr Fergusson, RID

Mrs McAuley
Mr. [unclear]
LP 24/10

PS/Secretary of State (B&L)

**SPEECH BY THE TAOISEACH MR BERTIE AHERN AT THE ANNUAL WOLFE TONE
COMMEMORATION, BODENSTOWN, SUNDAY, 19 OCTOBER 1997 AT 12.15 PM
APPROX**

I attach for your information a copy of the Speech made by the Taoiseach, Mr Bertie Ahearn on 19 October 1997 at the annual Wolf Tone commemoration.

Signed

JOANNE MAXWELL

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**SPEECH BY THE TAOISEACH MR BERTIE AHERN AT THE ANNUAL WOLFE TONE
COMMEMORATION, BODENSTOWN, SUNDAY, 19 OCTOBER 1997 AT 12.15 PM
APPROX**

The United Irishmen, of which Wolfe Tone was a leading light, were a society of democrats centred in Belfast and Dublin. The Belfast-Dublin corridor was in those days a corridor of liberty and democracy. At that time to be a democrat was to be a subversive, undermining a grossly unequal political order, based on the type of domination and privilege that was being swept away by the French Revolution.

An entry in Tone's diary for 19 August 1792 on his journey through the North records:

'Ride to Rostrevor, more and more in love with it; dinner, thirty people, many of them Protestant, invited on the occasion. Dr. Moody, the Dissenting Minister, says grace; bravo, all very good, toasts excellent. United Irishmen mentioned again, and the idea meets universal approbation; hope it may do; wonderful to see how rapidly the Catholic mind is rising, even in this Tory town'.

Our Presidential candidate Mary McAleese, originally from Belfast, is a resident of the same Rostrevor, a beautiful town beneath the Mourne Mountains. She has worked in the South in Trinity and in RTE. It has been her job as Pro-Vice Chancellor in Queen's Belfast to unite Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter, to bring together on a daily basis in a working environment people of all political and religious traditions, and to try and move attitudes forward to the Information Age and the pluralist tolerance which people nowadays expect as a right. No one has the right to question her Irishness, for which she and her family once had to suffer, or her total commitment to peace on this island.

Mary McAleese's candidacy reflects our original ideals as a party. She is someone extraordinarily well qualified, who brings together a wide knowledge and experience of working with people and institutions North and South. Her candidacy reflects our openness as a society to people from all backgrounds and traditions to play a part in the political life of this country. As President, she will be more than Head of State. She will also be the symbolic embodiment of the nation in all its extent. I know she will approach the sensitivities

of relations in the North and between North and South with care and consideration. I know Mary McAleese will do us proud, as Mary Robinson did us proud. although they are in some ways very different people. She will be able to project a positive and enlightened influence and play an important role in leading and inspiring our whole nation into the 21st century and the new millennium. A good President, whether in Ireland or Israel or Germany, can give leadership to a nation by expressing and articulating its values in their highest form.

The last few months have seen remarkable political progress. The IRA ceasefire of 1994 has been re-instated. We have commenced substantive all-party talks, having cleared away some of the hurdles. The real negotiations are between the parties on this island, as envisaged in the Downing Street Declaration, with the British Government playing a facilitating role. The British Government have promised to give effect 'to any measure of agreement on future relationships in Ireland which the people living in Ireland may themselves freely so determine without external impediment'. We are taking part in the most

Important negotiations to have taken place since 1921, and their object is to replace or transcend arrangements that have failed in the past. There is no real alternative except to find agreement and to stay at the table till that is done.

Building confidence on both sides of the divide is vital. I welcome the initial steps taken by both Governments in relation to prisoners, and look forward to further steps. As far as political confidence is concerned, I would like Unionists to accept that there is absolutely no intention on our part to engage in the folly of trying to coerce a majority in the North into a united Ireland against their will. We want to reach agreement on the basis of respect for them. At the same time, Nationalists should be confident that the Irish Government is willing to act as a trustee for their rights, with vigour, if necessary, and that we will only support a settlement that is just and equitable to them as well as to others.

Any settlement will involve constitutional change in a number of different senses. Both British and Irish constitutional provisions will need to be adapted to accept more explicitly the principle of consent so as to avoid all misunderstanding. For a Republican, sovereignty must always reside with the people, not with a State. The reality today is that Ireland can only be reunited by the free choice and co-determination of its people North and South.

The establishment of new democratic and cooperative institutions, both in the North, and between North and South, will also involve constitutional change under both British and Irish law.

I also expect more fundamental and competing constitutional choices for the future to be discussed and debated in the talks, even if no final resolution of them can now be made. It would indeed be a pity to pass up this opportunity for a radical re-examination of relations on this island and between these islands, but in the recognition that new political arrangements will only work with the broad consent of both Unionists and nationalists.

Much has changed in 75 years, since Ireland became a recognised independent State. Originally, partition was a great wrench, which cut off the most prosperous and industrially advanced part of the island from the rest, and which seriously inhibited the progress of the

Whole. It also separated communities, many of whom longed to be part of our State. That is the reason why our party withheld its consent from partition, and denied absolute British claims to sovereignty over any part of Ireland. During the intervening period, we have consolidated our democratic institutions, established our status as a full member of the European Union and the United Nations, and made great strides forward economically, especially in recent times. There is a confidence around today that has almost never existed in the past.

While all of us here seek one day an Ireland reunited in peace and agreement, it is no longer out of any selfish interest on our part. It is because we believe that that would be the optimum outcome for all the people of this island, if not immediately, certainly in the medium term. Our sense of completeness or otherwise today relates far more to people of Ireland, in terms of high economic growth and inward investment, a seat in our own right in the European Union, and a community of interest across a broad area. Our society today is tolerant and pluralist, as never before.

Ireland enjoys tremendous support and goodwill from the United States. If the people in the North are to progress at an equally satisfactory rate compared to other places, they need to work out an accommodation between them, taking account of their respective wider relationships. I believe that over the next generation intelligent people in the present broad majority community in the North will begin to re-examine their long-term future, as some business and Church people are already doing, in the context of a new partnership between Britain and Ireland in a wider European context. They will see the sense in both parts of Ireland working more closely together, instead of continually striving against the grain to remain apart.

The insight is not an entirely new one. It is also a vision that people had in the past that may once again become more practicable in the future. The Conservative and Unionist statesman Lord Birkenhead, a negotiator of the Treaty, who had earlier led some of the political resistance to Home Rule, wrote to the President of the Executive Council W. T. Crosgrave in 1926:

'God Almighty made us contiguous islands I have never concealed my view that the necessary and ultimate solution is an all-Ireland Parliament We are inter-independent Every sensible Englishman hopes that one day or other a single Government will rule all Ireland'.

I have no doubt that still remains the opinion of most thinking people in Britain today, but it has to come about in harmony and agreement between the two communities as well as the two islands, and I still have hope that I will see the day.

This year, the 75th anniversary of the establishment of the Irish Free State, an important stage in our post-1916 constitutional development, will be marked on 6 December by a cross-party reception in Dublin Castle. It is my firm intention, as I proposed from the Opposition benches, to mark in the most solemn manner the passage into history of the deep wounds and divisions associated with the transition to political independence. We will honour both the statesmen who founded the Free State, as well as those who stood by the

Republic, recognising that they were all patriots, who shared the same ultimate objective of full national freedom by one route or the other. Collins, de Valera, Griffith and many of their leading contemporaries were all great Irishmen, as far as I am concerned, who played an equal and honourable part in winning Ireland's independence, as did many distinguished women patriots.

More difficult but equally necessary will be in years to come our obligation to honour with less inhibition on our part the positive parts of the Unionist contribution and tradition. We should acknowledge openly that there were also positive aspects to our long interaction with Britain, besides conquest and oppression. It is becoming easier to do this now, when broadly speaking our independence is fully respected by our neighbours, and as mutual respect for both traditions grows.

In that spirit a peace and reconciliation it is our task at the end of the 20th century to repair the structural defects and mend the relationships within Ireland, Northern Ireland, and between Ireland and Britain. We have two Governments working closely together. We seek peace and friendship with both communities in the North. We must end once and for all the scourge of sectarian hatred. We will set out to achieve all the progress that is possible for now, without attempting to fix the boundary to the progress of a nation. In the end, we will seek to achieve the vision for Ireland that Wolfe Tone shared in the summer of 1795 on the Cave Hill with his United Irish friends from Belfast, both men and women. As we approach the important bicentenary of 1798, their spirit of idealism and hope is re-awakening, as we bring North and South, Belfast and Dublin, closer again than we have been for 200 years.