

APRIL 10th
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Concluding Statement

When the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition came to these negotiations we welcomed them with an optimism borne out of necessity. We are still optimistic, but even more conscious now of the historic challenges and opportunities that face us all. We owe it to all those who have suffered and died over the past three decades to grasp this opportunity to build a society that will stand as a living testimony to the victims of the Troubles.

If we are to achieve this task we must do it together. Not by monopolising power, but by sharing it. Not by seeking to shatter the aspirations of any sector of our society, but by creating a space for them. Not by being restricted by a politics of anger, resentment and rigidity, but by daring to envisage a politics that can be open and imaginative, and even courageous. It is our belief that there are many around this table who, through their actions, have shown that such a politics is possible.

The Women's Coalition has built its contribution around three core principles - equality, inclusiveness and respect for human rights. We believe that the new politics we are now creating will incorporate these principles. Human rights and equality are not a victory for one group over another, they are basic requirements that must form the bedrock of society. A society which we should feel proud to be able to fashion for our children.

We are mindful of all the support and help that we have received in getting to this point. The unstinting, and skilful, work of our three independent Chairpersons - Senator Mitchell, General de Chastelain and Prime Minister Holkeri - together with their magnificent staff who have shown such enormous dedication. The commitment of the Governments of both the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom, and the personal commitment shown by Tony Blair, Bertie Ahern, David Andrews, and of course Mo Mowlam, without whose determination this process may well have faltered. The amazing pool of international good will that has always been on call when needed. And perhaps most importantly, the sense that people and communities across Northern Ireland - and beyond - willed and hoped and prayed that this process would succeed. Even in the darkest of days over the last two years there has always been that echo - "If only our politicians would sit down together, talk to each other and come to an agreement" - and now, at last, we have.

We understand we are only at the start of a peace process. Peace will not simply happen, it must be built through a sense of mutual respect and accommodation of our differences. It requires honest recognition that change is inevitable, and that it is the primary role of political leadership to manage that change in a manner that will include people in this divided society of ours. This policy of inclusion must also ensure that those communities who have suffered most during the years of violence, will benefit from the peace.

We must develop a sense of confidence that will allow us to envisage a future that is not about victory or defeat, but is about forging new relationships. Not only in this region, but within this island, and between these islands. This Agreement will offer a framework, but it will take work and energy and a generosity of mind to translate it into practice. The Women's Coalition firmly believe that this can be done; and we commit ourselves to working in both the political sphere and throughout broader society, to help achieve a future that will be worthy of all our hopes and all our aspirations. To do less would not only sell short the sacrifices of the past, but also the future of our children.