



## PRESS RELEASES

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### ASHDOWN - TORIES MUST NOT PLAY THE ORANGE CARD

Speaking this morning at a Westminster Press Conference, Rt Hon Paddy Ashdown MP will say:

"I am delighted that Peter Brooke has responded to the opportunities for reconciliation in Northern Ireland by calling in the constitutional political parties for talks. There could be no more fitting riposte to the IRA, following last week's atrocity, than that we should initiate the thing they fear most - a new round of talks and a new possibility for reconciliation. Mr Brooke has given the effective answer to those who say that he is a 'lame-duck' Secretary of State.

Three of the four constitutional parties have agreed to these talks; the pressure is now on Dr Paisley. It is vital that all parties should respond to Mr Brooke's invitation in good faith, and agree that the talks will continue to their conclusion whatever the result of the next General Election.

But that good faith will be put at risk if Mr Major continues to fudge on the future of the talks, and the Anglo-Irish Agreement. His failure to answer my question yesterday - and his reference to 'no imminent change' in policy - has added to uncertainty and speculation about the Government's commitment to the talks.

I am sure that Mr Brooke understands the importance of clarity in the Government's position. He must not be undermined by Conservative Party managers who have other issues on their mind, and who appear to want to play the Orange Card if it is needed to save their skins.

I do not believe that Mr Brooke would be prepared to ditch the Anglo-Irish Agreement in the interests of the Tory Party. The question is, does Mr Major support him? The Prime Minister's lack of clarity on this has led to uncertainty about the Conservative Party's intentions. Nothing could be more irresponsible in Northern Ireland and nothing could be more dangerous to long-term prospects for peace."

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