



10 DOWNING STREET
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THE PRIME MINISTER

16 September 1994

Dear John,

I am sending with this letter a copy of the statement I shall be making shortly at a press conference at Stormont.

I have taken the opportunity of my visit to explain the Government's approach directly to the people of Northern Ireland, two weeks after the IRA's announcement of a cessation of operations.

I know that you will wish to study this statement carefully. You will see the emphasis I have placed on the consent of the people of Northern Ireland. I hope that you and your party will feel able to support the approach I have described.

*Yours Sincerely,
John Major*

Dr John Alderdice

STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER ON NORTHERN IRELAND ON 16 SEPTEMBER

I have come to Northern Ireland today to talk directly to the people.

More than two weeks have now passed without IRA violence. This is very good news. The longer it lasts, the more hopes will rise that we may have an unparalleled opportunity for progress. But I know also, in this fast moving situation, that many people in Northern Ireland still have suspicions and doubts. They are worried and uncertain. Are the IRA sincere? What will the Government do? These are the questions in people's minds. It is for the IRA themselves to demonstrate that they are sincere.

I want now to make the Government's position clear.

Our first objective has always been to secure a permanent end to all paramilitary violence. By the Downing Street Declaration we created, with the Irish Government, the conditions to achieve that objective, and we welcome the cessation of PIRA violence which would not have occurred without it.

This cessation of violence has not been bought. No price has been paid for it. The principle guiding us remains that of democratic consent. Our commitment to the constitutional guarantee remains absolute. There have been no secret deals made directly or indirectly, no secret assurances given, no nods, no winks, no tricks with mirrors. And most importantly after 25 years of bloodshed and terror, we have not lowered our guard.

The approach we have taken is scrupulously fair to both sides of the community in Northern Ireland; seeks to recognise their legitimate aspirations; and does not favour one side or the other. I dearly want to see peace firmly established on all sides. But I need to be certain of the commitment to it of the IRA and Sinn Fein.

I am now going to build on the encouraging progress of the last two weeks and to chart the way forward. I have these points to make.

First, we need to be able to assume sensibly that Sinn Fein and the IRA are now genuinely committed to end violence permanently. This is because neither we nor the main constitutional parties can sit down at the table with them to negotiate under even the possibility of a threat.

Have the IRA now given up violence for good? Only they can know, of course, for it is their own true intentions that will decide the matter. With the responsibility that we as the Government carry for the well-being of all the people of Northern Ireland, we have only got their words and their actions to go on. So we have looked at these very carefully.

They have made statements which point in the right direction. We need to know from their words and their actions that this is a firm and unequivocal decision. They are nearly there. I hope they will have the courage to remove ambiguities and make the clear statement everyone wishes to hear.

We shall therefore go on scrutinising both words and actions until - as we hope - we can sensibly make the assumption that the IRA truly intend to end violence for good. Within three peaceful months of that, we shall be able to take part with Sinn Fein in the exploratory dialogue to which we are committed.

My second point concerns the outcome of the three-stranded political talks.

The aim of these talks is to reach agreement on new political arrangements within Northern Ireland, and on the future relationships between the two parts of the island and between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland.

It is vital that we should move forward with the widespread consent and confidence of the people of Northern Ireland. They, and the parties engaged in the talks, want to be sure that the outcome will not be imposed upon them without their democratic consent. There will be siren voices telling them they will be tricked. I want to tell them that they will not be tricked.

I intend to fulfil the commitment - made with the agreement of the parties by Peter Brooke when he launched the talks in 1991 - to ensure that their outcome was acceptable to the people.

So for the avoidance of any doubt, I want to make clear today that the Government will submit the final outcome of the three stranded process of talks to the electorate in Northern Ireland for approval in a referendum. That is to say, we shall consult the people of the Province on the full package of proposals as a whole. The details of such a referendum will rightly be for discussion with the parties.

Let me say to all the people of Northern Ireland: the referendum means that it will be your choice whether to accept the outcome. My commitment means that no one can go behind your backs. Not today. Not tomorrow. Not at any time. You can forget this talk of secret deals. It will be for you to decide.

I have already said that I am still looking for a clearer indication that the IRA's violence is over for good. But it is not only their violence that has scarred the life of Northern Ireland. INLA and the Loyalist paramilitaries should also end their campaigns. There is no shred of justification for it. The Loyalists should make good their earlier statements that their violence would end when IRA violence was halted. They should now respond to the many appeals to them from political, church and community leaders.

This brings me to my third point.

The broadcasting restrictions were brought in to stop supporters of terrorist organisations from using television and radio to justify violence.

I believe the restrictions are no longer serving the purpose for which they were intended. Ways have been found to circumvent them. But, most importantly, we are now in very different circumstances from those of 1988, when the restrictions came in.

The Government has therefore decided that the broadcasting restrictions will now be lifted. The Secretary of State for

National Heritage is taking the necessary steps to bring this into effect immediately.

All paramilitaries, and those who speak on their behalf, now have an opportunity. The opportunity to tell us directly, not under the cover of an actor's voice, that they are truly committed to peaceful methods only, and to there being no resumption of violence in the future.

Let them tell the people of the United Kingdom, loud and clear, face to face, that their commitment to end violence is genuine and lasting. They should do this without delay if they want to show that they are at last ready to enter the democratic process.