

costs. Even as a short-term measure, this imposes a heavy and unfair burden on troop-contributing countries, particularly those which, like Ireland, have fully discharged all their financial obligations to the Organisation.

If all member States were to declare here their intentions to pay assessed contributions in full, on time and without conditions, both for peacekeeping and the regular budget, this single commitment would do more than any other to strengthen the UN's capacity to act effectively.

Northern Ireland

When I spoke last year to this Assembly about the Northern Ireland situation, I stressed the importance of the announcement, a few weeks earlier, of the complete cessation of military operations by the IRA.

This was followed, some weeks afterwards, by a similar announcement by representatives of the loyalist paramilitaries.

Thankfully, the guns have now been silent in Northern Ireland for the past year.

This has brought the gift of peace, and the gift of hope, to a situation where both had been sorely lacking.

The gift of peace has been profoundly welcome. The unrelenting toll of death and destruction which disfigured Northern Ireland over the past generation has been halted. The economic opportunities offered by peace have rapidly begun to be exploited. Freed from the shadow of terrorism, human contacts have multiplied across the divide in Northern Ireland, and between both parts of Ireland.

The paramilitary leaders, through the maintenance of their ceasefires, have made an important first contribution to the climate of hope. However, only the two Governments and the political leaders in Northern Ireland can consolidate the hope implicit in the cessation of violence, by underpinning it with an agreed political settlement which can enjoy the consent and allegiance of all.

That is now the paramount goal.

In the Joint Declaration of 15 December 1993, the British and Irish Governments acknowledged as their goal "to remove the causes of conflict, to overcome the legacy of history and to heal the divisions which have resulted". This task can now be addressed free of the polarizing and distorting influences which terrorism, and the counter-measures it calls forth, exert on the political process. It is vital that this unprecedented opportunity should be grasped.

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A settlement of the Northern Ireland conflict requires the engagement and cooperation of both Governments and of the political leaders of both communities in Northern Ireland.

The close cooperation of the two Governments has been the enabling condition for progress to date. The Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985 and the Joint Declaration of 1993 are landmark documents in that process. Last February, we published a New Framework for Agreement, setting out the shared assessment of the two Governments on how a balanced and honourable accommodation could be envisaged across all the key relationships. While this is not a blue-print to be imposed on the parties, it reflects long and careful consideration between the two Governments on how the underlying realities should be addressed, and is designed to give impetus and direction to the process of negotiations.

The role of the two Governments is crucial because the Northern Ireland conflict is primarily about the wider British or Irish allegiances resolutely cherished by the two communities there. For that reason, there can be no purely internal solution. Innovative thinking and potentially difficult decisions will be required on both sides of the Irish Sea if the two Governments are to create the context and conditions where the conflicting allegiances can at last be reconciled.

The success of these intergovernmental efforts will however be measured ultimately by attitudes of the two communities within Northern Ireland.

The attitude of the nationalist tradition has been characterized by an ever-growing acceptance of the principle that there would be no change in the status of Northern Ireland without the consent of a majority of the people there.

They look in turn to the unionist community for an acknowledgement that the principle of consent, as well as being a rightful protection for unionists against the imposition of a united Ireland against the wishes of a majority of the people in Northern Ireland, also implies the rights of nationalists in Northern Ireland to be governed by structures which are relevant and responsive in terms of their allegiance and aspirations.

The denial of the principle of consent, and of mutual respect, has been costly in the past. The relative weights of the communities within Northern Ireland, as in Ireland as a whole, means that coercion is quite simply impossible, even if anyone were foolish enough to attempt it. Cooperation and consent at all levels are not just the best policy, but the only possible policy.

Because of this reality, the politics of the peace process must be resolutely inclusive. Any viable settlement must deal with each community as it defines itself, not as others would find it

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convenient for it to be. For that reason I welcome the fact that the new leader of Ulster unionism is among the most forceful and assertive representatives of his community's philosophy.

The test of statesmanship for any leader in Northern Ireland, and the kind of solution we seek, is not about abating the rights of either community. It is about finding the way to respect them which are compatible with equally important rights on the other side.

We know that talks can succeed only if both communities in Northern Ireland are reliably and authentically represented there. Nationalists should be represented in its integrity at those talks, and so also must unionism. Both have to spell out how they propose to accommodate satisfactorily a tradition and an identity which is not their own.

Both Governments have explicitly set inclusive and comprehensive negotiations as their goal, yet these have not yet begun. That failure is frustrating and threatens to dissipate the momentum towards a lasting peace. It would be serene and dangerous if those who have been persuaded to abandon violence were now to be denied the chance to make their case politically. It is vital, therefore, that obstacles in the way of comprehensive negotiations should now be overcome.

One of the most difficult obstacles is that the continued existence of arsenals of guns and explosives is a source of fear, anxiety and mistrust.

The Irish Government, for its part, are absolutely determined that all arms be erased from the political equation as soon as possible. Any debate is about the best means of achieving this, not about whether it should be done.

It is because of the importance of this goal that we wish to situate it in the context where it is most likely to be achieved in practice. We seek to avoid as far as possible symbolic overtones of surrender, or of a one-sided admission of guilt. In this context, no less than others in Northern Ireland, the concepts of victory and defeat will never offer a solution.

To make the decommissioning of weapons a precondition for entry into negotiations - as opposed to an important goal to be realised in that process - ignores the psychology and motivation of those on both sides in Ireland who have resorted to violence, and the lessons of conflict resolution elsewhere.

We should treat negotiations as far as possible as a practical step. Rather than surrounding entry into negotiations with preconditions, we should instead seek to build golden bridges to enable and encourage all to take part.

Facsimile COVER SHEET

We need all those who have been part of the problem to become, as far as possible, part of the solution. Given the depth and cost of the problem participation in negotiations should be treated as a necessity and a duty, not a privilege to be jealously withheld or awarded. If we militarily preconditions we are in danger of saying, in effect, that negotiations can take place only when the problems they are supposed to address have already been largely solved.

In saying this, I do not wish to be in any way dismissive of the genuine difficulty many people in Northern Ireland have in dealing on an equal footing with those who have in the past used or condoned violence and coercion.

It is clear that there is ample room for further guarantees and assurances aimed at building trust and confidence in relation to this sensitive issue. If these guarantees and assurances can be authoritatively and credibly underwritten by a respected and objective outside agency so much the better. That is why the idea of an international dimension to this confidence-building process is so appealing. We continue to work on it, in the hope that it can provide a bridge for all sides to overcome the present difficulty.

Conclusion

Mr President

The Secretary General has eloquently expressed the essence of our task in this anniversary year. I quote:

"To support the United Nations is not, and never has been, to subsidize a separate, independent entity. Today, more than ever, to support the United Nations is to participate in the only world organization possessed of all humanity and in the service of all humanity."

Today a half-century later, it is his duty and our privilege to take this project to its next stage - the achievement of an age of peace, development and security."

Thank you Mr. President.