

STATEMENT BY MR BRIAN LENIHAN T.D. AT THE FORUM FOR PEACE AND RECONCILIATION ON THE POLITICAL STRUCTURES IN NORTHERN IRELAND, DUBLIN CASTLE, FRIDAY, 16 JUNE 1995.

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Fianna Fáil have taken the view over recent years that, provided the basis of cross-community support is accepted as a governing principle, the exact nature of political institutions in Northern Ireland should be left to the Northern parties to negotiate and agree among themselves. We do not wish to be accused of interfering in the strictly internal affairs of Northern Ireland. The Irish Government are not involved in Strand 1 of the Talks Process.

On the other hand, Article 4 of the Anglo-Irish Agreement does state that in the Conference framework 'the Irish Government may put forward views and proposals on the modalities of bringing about devolution in Northern Ireland in so far as they relate to the interests of the minority community'. When I was Co-Chairman of the Conference in the late 1980s, we chose not to exercise that right.

Some years ago, my party would have been somewhat sceptical about the restoration of internal political structures to Northern Ireland, ~~and indeed about its~~  
*However*  
~~viability as a political~~ entity. ~~But~~ since then the views on internal structures between the Northern Ireland parties have converged, and a good deal of progress was made

in the Brooke-Mayhew talks in 1991 and 1992, which is reflected in the British Government document we have before us. There <sup>is now</sup> ~~seems to be~~ a broad consensus on all sides that a return to majoritarianism is not a feasible option, <sup>and</sup> ~~as~~ obviously fears of a return to majority rule are still great in the Nationalist community. More and more of the Councils in Northern Ireland are practising some form of power-sharing, and I think the SDLP should be congratulated on the lead they gave in this area many years ago, especially in the Councils where they had a majority and where there was no need for power-sharing. The benefit of that example as it has become more extended is obvious. I should also say that the Alliance Party as well have been fully supportive of power-sharing. <sup>in favour I would like to congratulate the Alliance Party for their excellent work in N.I.</sup> There is also a good deal of emerging cross-party agreement on the economic and social agenda facing Northern Ireland, which would be the main work of a devolved administration.

Structures in Northern Ireland should not be seen in isolation. There was a consensus in the New Ireland Forum that purely internal structures would not work. But it is obvious that new structures <sup>should</sup> ~~would~~ facilitate North-South cooperation, and enable the Northern parties to take over to a large extent the cooperative functions at present exercised by the British Government within the Anglo-Irish Conference.

My party broadly welcome the content of the British Government's paper, read in

conjunction with the Framework Document. We believe it is for the Northern parties to negotiate the details.

Like many in this Forum, I would like to see an early move to all-party negotiations on an inclusive basis. I welcomed the realism of the Methodist Church here last week with regard to not laying down preconditions. I am not surprised that President Clinton has been expressing grave concern about the current state of progress. While he stressed the importance of decommissioning and other confidence-building measures in Washington, he did not erect any of them into preconditions for talks. There are more signs of movement and flexibility emerging on all sides, and I hope every effort will be made by everyone to overcome the obstacles. There is no alternative to negotiations, whether bilateral or multilateral.

Finally, may I say that I regard the intervention of former Chancellor Mr Norman Lamont two days ago, where he criticised John Major for too much speed in the peace process, as totally unhelpful and unjustified. Mr Lamont should recognise this is an area where John Major has made a vital contribution to the achievement of peace after 25 years. Mr Lamont should not try to play internal party politics with the peace process.