

[Bridging Sentence .....]

Northern Ireland, with which the City has such long connections, is in the forefront of our minds, as you would expect.

Here in the City of London you have this year and last experienced murderous attacks by the Provisional IRA.

You have been resilient and resolute in your response. That has always been your way.

Those same qualities continue to be displayed by the people of Northern Ireland, after 23 years of violence in their part of this democracy called the United Kingdom.

The Guildhall is no bad place for a Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to pledge anew that, against the assaults of cruel violence, democracy will be defended by this Government.

That is what we are about in Northern Ireland: standing up unshakably to those who, knowing that they will not get their way by democratic means, use bombs and bullets instead.

I say this tonight: such people by these means will advance their political cause by not one inch.

We are never going to undermine constitutional politics in our democracy - and that is the key - by bargaining with those who bring bombs to the table: nor with those who justify their conduct.

It is the democratic wishes of Northern Ireland's people as to their future in the Union that we shall always stand behind.

Our message to the terrorists of every kind is this: the Government's position has long been made clear. If you seek political influence then renounce and reject violence for good.

We are determined to do all in our power to ensure the chances of bringing those hopes to fruition.

The Irish Government is at one with us in this. The two Governments agree that if and when such a renunciation of violence has been made and sufficiently demonstrated, new doors could open and both Governments would wish to respond imaginatively.

But in parallel with their demand for an end to violence, and independently of it, the people of Northern Ireland want to see their own politicians talking. There is unity throughout the community in denouncing the horrors of the wanton attacks in the Shankill and at Greysteel.

That unity is reflected in the people's unprecedented demand that political means now be found that will lead to a less antagonistic way of life in Northern Ireland within a stable framework of relationships: means that will lead towards partnership and away from divisive partisanship.

It is our duty, all of us, to help. We believe that this process of political talks which made so much progress last year still offers the best way forward.

We want to see the pace of that process now stepped up. I discussed this with the leaders of the main constitutional parties in Northern Ireland over the last two weeks. If it is thought helpful we are ready to table our own suggestions for helping the process forward, building on the experience we have all gained.

The Irish Government have made it clear that they share our desire for immediate progress. They are committed to principles expressed by the Taoiseach and by Mr Spring which we find greatly encouraging. For our own part we look forward to early progress in those areas which, under the agreed arrangements, are for the two Governments to discuss, between themselves.

My Lord Mayor, while there is much indeed in Northern Ireland that causes grave concern, there are also sensible, rational grounds for hope. We are determined to do all in our power to maximise the chances of bringing those hopes to fruition.