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DRAFT STATEMENT

1. I should like to explain the British Government's position on the constitutional issues in respect of Northern Ireland.
2. We confirm our wish, and commitment to ensure, that Northern Ireland should remain in the United Kingdom unless and until that might cease to be the wish of a majority of its people, and that it would be wrong to change that status without the consent of such a majority.
3. Nonetheless, the British Government affirms that it has no selfish strategic or economic interest in retaining Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom against the wishes of its people; that its primary interest is to see peace, stability and reconciliation established by agreement among all the people who inhabit the island; and that it will work with the Irish Government to achieve such an agreement which will embrace the totality of relationships, and lead to the establishment of arrangements and institutions which reflect the principles of equality of opportunity, equity of treatment and parity of esteem and hence attract the support and assent of all their people.
4. At the same time, the British Government:
 - (i) acknowledges that the people living in Ireland, North and South, should be free, without coercion or violence, to determine their own future;
 - (ii) confirms in particular that the future status of Northern Ireland should only be determined on the basis of concurrent consent, North and South, of the people living in Ireland;

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- (iii) accepts and acknowledges accordingly that if, but only if, a majority in each part of Ireland freely expressed the wish that there should be a united Ireland then this should come about;
- (iv) confirms, in particular, that if, in the future, a majority of the people of Northern Ireland clearly wish for and formally consent to the establishment of a united Ireland, it will introduce and support legislation to give effect to that wish;
- (v) confirms its wish to see agreement reached between the people of the island of Ireland, North and South, on arrangements, structures or institutions to which all the people living in Ireland could give assent and support;
- (vi) confirms that such arrangements, structures or institutions may, if so empowered by the relevant Parliaments, take the form of agreed structures for the island as a whole;
- (vii) acknowledges, accordingly, a binding obligation to work to implement without impediment any measure of agreement on future relationships in the island of Ireland, whether of this character or any other, which the people living in the North and South respectively may themselves freely determine and consent to;

and accordingly hereby agrees that it is for the people of the island of Ireland alone to exercise such rights of self-determination on the basis of freely and concurrently given consent, North and South.

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5. The British Government acknowledges that a substantial minority of the people of Northern Ireland wish for a united Ireland; accepts that they have the right to pursue that aspiration from a basis of parity of esteem, by peaceful and democratic means and without impediment; but believes that relations on the island of Ireland, and between the two islands, would be enhanced if the purported claim as of right to Northern Ireland in the Irish Constitution were amended to reflect the principle enunciated by or on behalf of the Irish Government, for example in the Brussels Joint Statement of 29 October 1993, that any political settlement must depend on consent freely given in the absence of force or intimidation.

6. The British Government believes that the people of Britain would wish, in friendship to them, to encourage the people of the island of Ireland, North and South, to reach agreement on how they may live in concord, harmony and partnership, showing respect for their diverse traditions and fully recognising the special links and the unique relationship which exist between the people of Britain and Ireland. The British Government will seek, consistently with the foregoing, to assist and enable such a process over a period of dialogue and co-operation based on full respect for the rights and identities of both traditions in Ireland.

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4. In confirming its wish, and its commitment to ensure, that Northern Ireland should remain in the United Kingdom unless and until that might cease to be the wish of a majority of its people, and that it would be wrong to change that status without the consent of such a majority, the British Government affirms nonetheless that it would have no selfish strategic or economic interest in retaining Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom against the wishes of its people; that its primary interest is to see peace, stability and reconciliation established by agreement among all the people who inhabit the island; and that it will work together with the Irish Government to achieve such an agreement which will embrace the totality of relationships. At the same time, the British Government:

(i) confirms that the future status of Northern Ireland should only be determined on the basis of concurrent consent, North and South, of the people living in Ireland;

(ii) accepts and acknowledges accordingly that if, but only if, a majority in each part of Ireland freely expressed the wish that there should be a united Ireland then this should come about;

(iii) confirms its wish to see agreement reached between the people of the island of Ireland, North and South, on arrangements, structures or institutions to which all the people living in Ireland could give assent and support;

(iv) confirms that such arrangements, structures or institutions may if so empowered by the relevant Parliaments take the form of agreed independent

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structures for the island as a whole;

(v) confirms, in particular, that if, in the future, a majority of the people of Northern Ireland clearly wish for and formally consent to the establishment of a united Ireland, it will introduce and support legislation to give effect to that wish;

(vi) acknowledges, accordingly, a binding obligation to work to implement without impediment any measure of agreement on future relationships in the island of Ireland whether of this character or any other which the people living in the North and South respectively may themselves freely determine and consent to;

and accordingly hereby acknowledges the legitimacy of claims to rights of self-determination made by the people of the island of Ireland, North and South. The British Government believes that the people of Britain would wish, in friendship to them, to encourage the people of the island of Ireland, North and South, to reach agreement on how they may live in concord, harmony and partnership, showing respect for their diverse traditions and fully recognising the special links and the unique relationship which exists between the people of Britain and Ireland. The British Government will seek, consistently with the foregoing, to assist and enable such a process over a period of dialogue and co-operation based on full respect for the rights and identities of both traditions in Ireland.