

**SECRET AND PERSONAL**

**JOINT DECLARATION: PARLIAMENTARY STATEMENT**

Madam Speaker, the Irish Prime Minister and I have this morning made the Joint Declaration about constitutional principles and political realities with particular reference to Northern Ireland.

Copies of the Joint Declaration are in the Library and the Vote Office. I wanted to explain to the House at the earliest opportunity the essential features of the Joint Declaration, and the reasons for making it.

Madam Speaker, the Declaration, which is fully compatible with the Talks process also involving the main Northern Ireland political parties, has been made following the continuing work between the two Governments on a framework for peace. The Declaration places the onus firmly on those who use or support violence to respond in the only acceptable way. They have no possible justification for not doing so.

The Declaration is consistent with the publicly stated principles of both Governments. It addresses the concerns of both sides of the community, and safeguards their vital interests. Its main features are as follows.

Paragraph 2 expressly reaffirms the British Government's commitment to Northern Ireland's statutory constitutional guarantee. As the House will know, this guarantees that Northern Ireland will not cease to be a part of the United Kingdom while that is the wish of a majority of its people.

Paragraph 4 reinforces this by reaffirming, on behalf of the British Government, that we will uphold the democratic wish of a greater number of the people of Northern Ireland on the issue of whether they prefer to support the union or a sovereign united Ireland.

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Also in paragraph 4, the British Government agrees that it is for the people of the island of Ireland alone, by agreement between the two parts respectively, to exercise their right of self-determination on the basis of consent, freely and concurrently given, North and South, to bring about a united Ireland, if that is their wish. As an essential complement to this, the Taoiseach acknowledges, in paragraph 5, that it would be wrong to attempt to impose a united Ireland in the absence of a freely-given consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland. In the same paragraph he also accepts, on behalf of the Irish Government, that the democratic right of self-determination by the people of Ireland as a whole must be achieved and exercised with and subject to the agreement and consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland.

In paragraph 4 the British Government also, in effect, reaffirms that it will introduce the necessary legislation if a future majority in Northern Ireland desires a united Ireland. This repeats the commitment in Article 1(c) of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. It also undertakes to give effect to any measure of agreement on future relationships which the people living in Ireland may so determine - for instance, in the context of an overall settlement resulting from the Talks.

In paragraph 7 the Taoiseach confirms that, in the event of an overall settlement, the Irish Government will, as part of a balanced constitutional accommodation, put forward and support proposals for change in the Irish Constitution which would fully reflect the principle of consent in Northern Ireland.

Paragraph 9 reaffirms that the British and Irish Governments will seek to pursue the political dialogue along with the Northern Ireland constitutional parties in order to create institutions and structures which would respect the diversity of the people of Ireland while enabling them to work together in areas of common interest.

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In paragraph 12 the two Governments reiterate that those committed to the cause of peace have an absolute responsibility to renounce permanently the use of, and support for, paramilitary violence. The British Government confirm that we would be prepared to enter preliminary exploratory dialogue with Sinn Fein three months after a permanent cessation of violence had been announced and established. The Irish Government confirm that, within their jurisdiction, they would also make their own arrangements which would enable Sinn Fein to enter into political dialogue. These would include the possible establishment in the Republic of Ireland, for the purpose of advising the Irish Government, of a Forum for peace and reconciliation.

The final paragraph highlights the Declaration's potential to transform the prospects for building on the progress already made in the Talks process involving the two Governments and the constitutional parties in Northern Ireland. If Mr Adams wants his claims that he is serious about peace to have any credibility, he Madam Speaker, the Taoiseach and I meet regularly on a six monthly basis, and more frequently where necessary. Over the period of our meetings, our objectives have always included bringing about a permanent cessation of violence in Northern Ireland, and establishing the basis for a lasting comprehensive political settlement.

In Brussels on 29 October, the Taoiseach and I acknowledged John Hume's courageous and imaginative efforts. But we agreed that any peace initiative could be taken only by the two Governments. There could be no question of our adopting or endorsing the report of the Hume/Adams dialogue.

In our Joint Statement on 29 October the Taoiseach and I also renewed our support for the objectives to the Talks process involving political dialogue between the two Governments and the main constitutional parties in Northern Ireland. We said we

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regarded that process as vital, and its objectives as valid and achievable.

Madam Speaker, today's Joint Declaration is the outcome of the work in their own terms between the two Governments on a framework for peace, stability and reconciliation consistent with our international obligations and our wider responsibilities to both sides of the community. The text is the sole responsibility of the two Governments. Both the Taoiseach and I have striven, in the Declaration, to address the concerns of both sides of the community, to express their validity, and to safeguard their vital interests.

Madam Speaker, the Provisionals and their apologists have been urging the two Governments to make a Joint Declaration. We have done so today. This Declaration is not the product of any bargaining or deal with the Provisionals. If Mr Adams wants his claims that he is serious about peace to have any credibility, he knows what to do.

The Provisionals have presented themselves as interested in securing peace. Yet they have failed to deliver an end to violence. So have the loyalists. They should do so now. They have no possible justification for not doing so. The people of these islands, and in particular of Northern Ireland, will expect, and deserve, no less.

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