

15 December 1993

TO ALL NIO STAFF

The Prime Minister and the Taoiseach have today made a Joint Declaration. I am writing to give you an outline of what it contains.

The Declaration, which complements and underpins the Talks process and the search for a comprehensive political settlement, has been made following discussions between the two Governments, since early last year, on a framework for peace. It places the onus firmly on those who use or support violence to stop now.

The Declaration sets out constitutional principles and political realities which safeguard the vital interests of both sides of the community in Northern Ireland.

The text both reiterates Northern Ireland's statutory constitutional guarantee and reaffirms that the British Government 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. On this basis the British Government reiterates that they have no selfish strategic or economic interest in Northern Ireland, and that, were a majority in

Northern Ireland to wish it, the Government would introduce legislation to bring about a united Ireland. For their part, the Irish Government accept that it would be wrong to attempt to impose a united Ireland, in the absence of the freely given consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland.

The British Government undertake to encourage the achievement of the objective of the Talks process, begun in 1991, namely an overall agreement based on full respect for the rights and identities of both traditions in Northern Ireland. The text does not envisage, nor advocate, any particular outcome. It states that:

"The British Government agree 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."

The Irish Government accept:

"... 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."

So it is clear that the consent of a majority of the people in Northern Ireland is required before any constitutional change could come about.

The Irish Government also confirm that, in the event of an overall settlement, they 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.

The Declaration reinforces the firm foundation for future political development, on the same three-stranded basis that the main constitutional parties in Northern Ireland and the two Governments have already accepted. Both Governments reiterate that, following a cessation of violence, democratically mandated parties which establish a commitment to exclusively peaceful methods, and which have shown that they will abide permanently by the democratic process, are free to participate fully in democratic politics and to join in dialogue in due course between the Governments and the political parties on the way ahead.

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