

JOINT DECLARATION BY THE BRITISH AND IRISH PRIME MINISTERS, 15
DECEMBER 1993

(Copies of the Joint Declaration are available in the Vote Office)

Key Points

1. The Prime Minister, the Rt Hon John Major MP, and the Irish Prime Minister, Mr Albert Reynolds TD, today issued a Joint Declaration.
2. 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.
3. The Declaration sets out constitutional principles and political realities which safeguard the vital interests of both sides of the community in Northern Ireland.
4. The Joint Declaration does not:
 - assert the value of achieving a united Ireland;
 - assert the legitimacy of a united Ireland in the absence of majority consent;
 - commit the British Government to joining the ranks of the persuaders for a united Ireland;
 - set any timescale for a united Ireland to come about nor indicate that this is even probable;
 - commit the people of Northern Ireland to joining a united Ireland against their democratic wishes;

SECRET AND PERSONAL

- establish arrangements for the exercise of joint authority between the British and Irish Governments over Northern Ireland;

- derogate in any way from UK sovereignty over Northern Ireland, nor diminish the constitutional guarantee;

- contain any reference to, or implicit commitment to, withdrawal of British troops from Northern Ireland;

- give Sinn Fein any immediate place at the Talks table;

- sideline the valuable round of meetings with the Northern Ireland parties being undertaken by Michael Ancram. On the contrary, it speaks of transforming the prospects for building on the progress already made.

5. 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 reiterate 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.

6. 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:

SECRET AND PERSONAL

SECRET AND PERSONAL

"The British Government agree that it is for the people of the land 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.

7. 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.

8. 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.

9. The Joint Declaration represents a sound platform for the Talks process and a realistic call for lasting peace. It shows the British and Irish Governments working together: for democracy and against violence. It is now for the men of violence to respond.

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