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SPEAKING NOTES FOR THE PRESS CONFERENCE

Positive points

1. The Taoiseach and I, supported by our colleagues, have had a serious and constructive meeting.
2. This was the most recent in our series of six-monthly bilateral meetings. We reviewed Anglo-Irish relations, concentrating particularly on Northern Ireland. ~~We also discussed some EC matters.~~
3. We both took as read all the points set out in our Brussels Joint Statement of 29 October. In particular, the two Governments will continue to work together in their own terms on a framework for peace, stability and reconciliation. The two Governments will also continue their discussions to provide a framework for the Talks process, for whose objectives we renewed our support at Brussels. We also firmly adhere to the principles in relation to those who currently use or support violence which we set out at Brussels. In particular, we continue to urge those claiming a serious interest in advancing the cause of peace in Ireland to renounce for good the use of, or support for, violence. At the same time, we stand by our position that such a renunciation, if made and sufficiently demonstrated, would meet with an imaginative response from the two Governments.
4. The Taoiseach and I both recognise that the most urgent and important set of issues facing the people of Ireland, North and South, the constitutional political parties, and the two Governments, is the need to bring terrorist violence to an end, remove the cause of the conflict, overcome the legacy of history, heal the divisions which have resulted, and secure a comprehensive and lasting political accommodation.

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5. These are matters of great sensitivity. The legitimate concerns of the different traditions must be fully recognized and safeguarded.

6. We are in no doubt that the absence of a lasting and satisfactory settlement of relationships between the people of both islands has contributed to continuing tragedy and suffering. We both share the view that a new accommodation, addressing all the relevant relationships, is best pursued through a process involving both Governments and the main constitutional political parties in Northern Ireland.

7. We have not today sought to reach agreement on all of the difficult matters facing us. But we have met, as ever, in a constructive and friendly spirit, and have made excellent progress. We propose to meet again in the course of the EC Summit in Brussels to take these matters further.

8. The Taoiseach and I both condemn the most recent terrorist attacks in Northern Ireland. We reaffirm our determination to maintain and further develop security co-operation. We strongly welcome the latest arms and explosives finds in Britain, the Republic and Northern Ireland. We reviewed today a number of specific security issues. We have identified a number of areas where further work should be undertaken to examine the potential for enhanced security co-operation.

7. We also had a useful discussion of EC matters.

Lines for use if there is a breach

1. The Taoiseach and I set out a number of important understandings in our Brussels Joint Statement of 29 October. I stand by those principles. In particular, any political

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settlement in Northern Ireland must depend on consent freely given in the absence of force or intimidation. There can be no weakening of the constitutional guarantee that Northern Ireland's present status as part of the United Kingdom will not change without the consent of a majority of its people.

2. It would be wrong for it to do so. (That is not to deny the legitimacy of the aspiration to a united Ireland.)

3. The British Government has made clear that if in the future a majority of the people of Northern Ireland wish for and consent to the establishment of a united Ireland, it will introduce and support legislation to give effect of that wish. But in advance of any such change, there can be no question of any Government which I lead joining the ranks of the persuaders. We have no difficulty with the aspiration to a united Ireland, but we will not urge the value of such an aspiration in circumstances where it does not command the majority support.

4. The British Government's position on Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution has been made clear many times. We acknowledge that a substantial minority of the people in Northern Ireland wish for a united Ireland. We accept 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 we believe that relations on the island of Ireland, and between the two islands, would in the right context be enhanced by a change in the Irish Constitution, whereby the claim of right to Northern Ireland is no longer exerted. We would also like to see the principle reflected (as enunciated in the Joint Statement of 29 October 1993) that any political settlement must depend on consent freely given in the absence of force or intimidation.

5. Patrick Mayhew and I have made clear that no one has been, and no one will be, authorised to have talks or negotiations with

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those who use or support violence. We remain committed to the pursuit of peace. But we are not prepared to bargain with the men of violence, or negotiate by proxy with them.

6. There is a world of difference between that and spelling out the British Government's position in response to an authentic request for advice from the Provisional leadership which we received on 22 February. It was our duty to do that, but there was no breach of our publicly stated principles.

7. There is no excuse for terrorism. It should be ended now. The onus for doing so is on those who perpetrate it.

8. The British Government continues to believe, as did Sir Ninian Stephen, that the objectives of the Talks process involving political dialogue between the two Governments and the four main constitutional parties in Northern Ireland remain valid and achievable. We will, if we judge it appropriate, set out our own assessment, taking account of the views of all of the Talks participants, of the most likely areas of convergence and the most profitable issues for further exploration and negotiation.

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