

For the people of Northern Ireland, 1994 is a year of opportunity, perhaps more so than in living memory. The conditions are right for the achievement of a political accommodation based on mutual respect, understanding and toleration. If we continue to go forward, as I believe we will, then within our grasp lie security, stability and, above all, the peace which we all want.

Of course, while the violence continues, this optimism needs to be qualified. But my hope for the future lies in you, the people of Northern Ireland. In recent months observers have detected an increasing determination amongst ordinary people to seek reconciliation, to understand and respect the fears and aspirations of their neighbours. This strengthening mood is, I am sure, in part the result of a desire to see something positive come out of the tragedies brought about by the terrorists - and of a belief that only through an accommodation can all parts of the community live together in a stable environment, without fear.

The changing mood is reflected in the discussions which I and Patrick Mayhew have had in recent months with your political and community leaders, churchmen and people from the business and academic worlds. I welcome the opportunity to pay tribute to the courage and leadership shown by many community representatives at all levels and from both traditions in Northern Ireland, in seeking progress and reconciliation. If we all continue to work together, we can sustain a momentum towards peace and reconciliation.

You, the people, are the key to this. But Governments must provide the framework. The Joint Declaration, which I and Albert Reynolds issued on 15 December 1993, does just that. In the name of both Governments, it restates in unequivocal terms the fundamental principles and guarantees which mean so much to all sides of the community in both parts of Ireland. It places great emphasis on respect for and understanding of different traditions and aspirations. In terms more comprehensive than ever before it sets out the philosophy which underpins the actions of both Governments.



I understand and respect those in Northern Ireland who are cautious when faced with an initiative of this sort. But I appeal to you - if you have not already done so, to read the Joint Declaration and take it at face value. It means what it says. The legitimacy of the Unionist position in Northern Ireland is fully accepted and safeguarded by both Governments while, in addressing the Dail on 17 December, Albert Reynolds said "I do not know of any fairer statement that has been, or could be made, by the British Government with regard to Nationalist ideals than what is set out in paragraph 4 of the Joint Declaration."

Above all the Declaration is a testament to peace. With the meeting of minds of the two Governments on the fundamental issues of principle, it must be clear to all that there is no way forward other than through the democratic process. There is nothing that the men of violence, whatever cause they may claim to represent, can seriously believe that they are able to achieve. With a permanent cessation of violence, and a commitment to the democratic process on Sinn Fein's part, we can be in exploratory dialogue with it within three months. But if there is no commitment to a permanent end to violence, then the terrorists and their supporters will face isolation and a bleak future while the rest of us get on with the agenda for peace.

We already have such an agenda which, I am determined, should be pursued with renewed vigour, in line with the principles set out in the Joint Declaration. In Brussels on 29 October I and the Taoiseach renewed our support for the objectives of the talks process, involving political dialogue between the two Governments and the main constitutional parties in Northern Ireland. That is the three stranded approach which made such progress in 1992.

We will continue to work towards agreement on a form of government and administration within Northern Ireland, which is readily accountable and commands widespread support throughout all parts of the community. If democracy is to flourish it is vital that people feel able to identify with and participate in institutions of government.



Strand 2 of the talks concerns relations between Northern Ireland and the South while strand 3 concerns the relationships between the two governments. Paragraph 9 of the Joint Declaration talks of the two Governments, along with the constitutional parties in Northern Ireland, creating through a process of political dialogue, "institutions and structures which, while respecting the diversity of the people of Ireland, would enable them to work together in all areas of common interest." It would of course be extraordinary if, as part of an overall political agreement, two friendly neighbours sharing the only common land border on an island did not adopt such an approach.

I am under no illusion that it will be easy to achieve agreement on these issues, especially as nothing is agreed until the whole package can be endorsed by the participants. But there is positive benefit in the large task which we have set ourselves. It is that once agreement is reached, it will be comprehensive, leaving room for no hidden agenda or uncertainty about key issues - uncertainty which can breed doubt, fear and instability, characteristics which are at the root of many of the conflicts facing the world today. The prize at the end of this process is such that I am confident that we will succeed.

Political accommodation, trust and respect between the different parts of the community in Northern Ireland, and the prospect of lasting peace, can transform many aspects of life within the Province. In particular, Northern Ireland, with its widely respected education system and well trained workforce, is already well placed to benefit from the economic upturn which we are experiencing in the United Kingdom. Long term stability, combined with the enormous fund of international goodwill generated by the Joint Declaration, can only enhance the attractiveness of Northern Ireland to inward investment as well as encouraging local entrepreneurs to expand existing businesses and open up new ones.



I should like now to pay tribute to the police and armed forces in Northern Ireland. They have over the years upheld the law and protected the community in an even-handed manner, often in the most difficult circumstances and with considerable courage and sacrifice. They will continue in their service of the whole community, and will respond in a manner commensurate with whatever level of threat the community faces.

Sadly there are in all parts of the community in Northern Ireland many who have suffered injury or who have lost loved ones as a result of terrorist activity. Some of you have written to me in recent months. You all have my heartfelt sympathy and indeed it is such suffering that drives us in the search for a lasting peace. But you may be assured that it will not be peace at any price. There will be no departure from the basic principles which guide us.

There is an opportunity for peace and political progress. We shall continue to work closely with the Irish Government, but it is above all for the people of Northern Ireland to shape their future. We in Government will be working to carry things forward - through the talks, through security policy, through action for jobs and social provision. There is now a framework, which reflects the concerns and aspirations of both sides of the community. I hope that we can all work together for a better Northern Ireland in 1994.

Your suggestion that I give the people of Northern Ireland the right of self determination and consent misses the point; they already have it. I have repeatedly made it clear that the Government will abide by the democratic wishes of the people of Northern Ireland. A majority has consistently expressed a wish to stay within the United Kingdom; my Government recognises that wish, respects it and stands fully behind it. There has been no change whatsoever in the constitutional guarantee under which Northern Ireland will remain part of the United Kingdom so long as that is the wish of the majority of its people.