

PRIME MINISTER'S OPENING STATEMENT

The Joint Declaration which the Taoiseach and I have made today reflects the drafting work which the two Governments have undertaken since our meeting in Dublin on 3 December.

2. 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.

3. 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.

4. We also 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. We said we regarded that process as vital and its objectives as valid and achievable.

5. In Dublin on 3 December we made clear that both Governments had been working on a Joint Declaration, consistent with our principles, which would address our understandings of constitutional principles and political realities.

6. The Joint Declaration which we have made today 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. It is also fully compatible with the Talks process.

7. The key features of the Declaration are these:

- 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, and to safeguard their vital interests
- the Provisional Movement have been urging the two Governments to make a Joint Declaration. We have made this one today. It 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. They should do so now. So should the Loyalists.

8. The content of the Declaration is important. It is entirely consistent with the principles of the two Governments. And it addresses the concerns of both sides of the community. The main elements are these:

- paragraph 2 expressly reaffirms the British Government's commitment to Northern Ireland's statutory constitutional guarantee. 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

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- paragraph 4 reiterates that the concern of the British Government is to uphold the democratic wishes of the [greater number of the] people of Northern Ireland
- the British Government accepts in paragraph 4 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 in the Anglo-Irish Agreement, the British Government in effect reaffirms that it will introduce the necessary legislation if a future majority in Northern Ireland desires a united Ireland
- in paragraph 5, the Taoiseach acknowledges 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
- in paragraph 5, the Taoiseach 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 in Northern Ireland
- 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

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- paragraph 9 reaffirms that the British and Irish Government 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
- paragraph [10] confirms that the British Government would be prepared to enter preliminary exploratory dialogue with Sinn Fein within three months after a permanent cessation of IRA violence had been announced and established. It also indicates that the Irish Government would make its own arrangements which would permit Sinn Fein to enter into political dialogue. Such exploratory dialogue must be distinguished from eligibility to sit down at the Talks table. That would be a matter for all concerned to consider in the light of a sufficiently demonstrated end to violence
- in paragraph 11 the two Governments seek to revitalise the Talks process, which involves also the main Northern Ireland constitutional parties.

9. The Taoiseach and I will be commending this Joint Declaration to our respective Parliaments tomorrow.

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