

JOINT DECLARATION

1. The Taoiseach and the British Prime Minister acknowledge that the most urgent and important issue facing the people of Ireland, North and South, and the British and Irish Governments together, is to remove the causes of conflict, to overcome the legacy of history and to heal the divisions which have resulted, recognising that the absence of a lasting and satisfactory settlement of relationships between the peoples of both islands has contributed to continuing tragedy and suffering.
2. They consider that the development of the European Community will of itself require new approaches to serve interests common to both parts of Ireland.
3. The Taoiseach and the British Prime Minister are convinced of the inestimable value to both their peoples of healing divisions in Ireland and of ending a conflict which has been so manifestly to the detriment of all. Both recognise that the ending of divisions can come about only through the agreement and cooperation of the people, North and South, representing both traditions in Ireland. They therefore make a solemn commitment to promote cooperation at all levels on the basis of the fundamental principles, undertakings and obligations under international agreements, to which they have jointly committed themselves, and the guarantees which each government has given. It is their aim to foster agreement and reconciliation, leading to a new political framework founded on consent and encompassing the whole island and its relations with the neighbouring island.



4. The Prime Minister reiterates on behalf of the British Government that they have no selfish strategic or economic interest in Northern Ireland. Their primary interest is to see peace, stability and reconciliation established by agreement among all the people who inhabit the island, and they will work together with the Irish Government to achieve such an agreement, which will embrace the totality of relationships. The role of the British Government will be to encourage, assist and enable such agreement over a period through a process of dialogue and cooperation based on full respect for the rights and identities of both traditions in Ireland. They accept that such agreement may, as of right, take the form of agreed independent structures for the island as a whole. The British Government agree that it is for the people of the island of Ireland alone to exercise their right of self-determination on the basis of freely and concurrently given consent, North and South, to bring about a united Ireland, if that is their wish. They reaffirm as binding obligations, both Northern Ireland's statutory constitutional guarantee and that they will, for their part, if a majority were clearly to express a wish to join in a united Ireland, introduce the legislation to give effect to that. Similarly they will act to give effect to any measure of agreement on future relationships in Ireland which the people living in Ireland may themselves determine without external impediment and on a basis of concurrent North/South consent. They believe that the people of Britain would wish, in friendship to all sides, to enable the people of Ireland to reach agreement on how they may live together in harmony and in partnership, with respect for their diverse traditions and with full recognition of the special links and the unique relationship which exists between the peoples of Britain and Ireland.



5. The Taoiseach, on behalf of the Irish Government, considers that the lessons of Irish history, and especially of Northern Ireland, show that stability and well-being will not be found under any political system which is refused allegiance or rejected on grounds of identity by a significant minority of those governed by it. He 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 the agreement and consent of the people of Northern Ireland and must, consistent with justice and equity, respect the democratic dignity and the civil rights and religious liberties of both communities. These would be reflected in any future political and constitutional arrangements emerging from a new and more broadly based agreement.
6. The Irish Government accordingly commit themselves to working in the spirit and on the basis of the Report of the New Ireland Forum to create 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. This will help over a period to build the trust necessary to end past divisions, leading to an agreed and peaceful future. Such structures would, of course, include institutional recognition of the special links that exist between the peoples of Britain and Ireland as part of the totality of relationships, while taking account of newly forged links with the rest of Europe.
7. In the light of their joint commitment to promote the foregoing objectives, the Taoiseach has indicated to the British Prime Minister his intention of establishing a permanent Irish Convention to consult and advise on the steps required to remove the barriers of distrust which at present divide the people of Ireland and which stand in the way of the exercise in common by them of self-determination on a basis of equality. It will be open to the Convention to make recommendations on ways in which agreement, as defined in the



Forum Report, and respect for the rights and identities of both traditions in Ireland, can be promoted and established. The Convention will operate with full respect for the authority of the institutions established by law in the State. It will be a fundamental guiding principle of the Convention that all differences between the Irish people relating to the exercise in common of the right to self-determination will be resolved exclusively by peaceful political means.

8. The Convention will be open to democratically mandated political parties in Ireland which abide exclusively by the democratic process and wish to share in dialogue about Ireland's political future and the welfare of all its people.