

BACKGROUND NOTE

NORTHERN IRELAND - POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

"In Northern Ireland My Government will continue ... to uphold the democratic wishes of its people and seek political progress by broadly based agreement,...."

The Government is seeking a permanent cessation of violence in Northern Ireland and a lasting political settlement. It regards these objectives as complementary.

In a process which began in 1991 with round table talks with the four main constitutional parties in Northern Ireland, the elements of a possible settlement have been under discussion. These talks have embraced relationships within Northern Ireland; and between Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom. Other strands of the talks, in which the Irish government has been involved, have considered relationships within the island of Ireland and the relationship between the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom.

In recent weeks, Ministers at the Northern Ireland Office have conducted exploratory discussions to find a basis for new talks. The Prime Minister has held meetings with the leaders of the four constitutional parties.

On 29 October, the British and Irish governments issued a joint statement in Brussels. They agreed that their two governments would work together in their own terms on a framework for peace, stability and reconciliation. They called for a permanent renunciation of violence. They urged the Northern Irish parties to intensify their efforts to find a basis for new talks.

In his Guildhall speech on 17 November, the Prime Minister reiterated the fundamental principle that no change could be made to the status of Northern Ireland without the consent of its people; and that the way would be open for Sinn Fein to enter the political arena as a democratic party if the IRA ended violence for good and demonstrated the permanence of their intention over a sufficient interval.

the Taoiseach, Mr. Jack Lynch

the Prime Minister, Mr. James Callaghan

12th December, 1973