



PRESS STATEMENT

20/04/98 NO EMBARGO

"Women's Coalition concerned about misleading claims"

The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition welcomed the Ulster Unionist executive's endorsement of Good Friday's settlement package. "We congratulate David Trimble on the strong show of support he received on Saturday," said Kate Fearon.

"However, we are seriously concerned about misleading statements being made by the anti-Agreement campaign," she added. "We hope that everyone will read the Agreement for themselves. But we know that people will be looking to their political leaders for guidance and interpretation."

"That is why it is absolutely vital for politicians to exercise responsible leadership. This is no time for scaremongering. The Agreement must not be used to promote selfish party agendas."

Ms. Fearon said that the Women's Coalition has worked hard to play a constructive role throughout the negotiating process. "Unhappily, the disgraceful behaviour of the 'No' campaign at last Friday's Forum shows that we still have a serious job of work to do."

"It is not just that they were abusing other members. We are unfortunately used to some members willingly to make a mockery of the Forum goal of promoting dialogue and understanding."

"What alarms us more is that they were actively misleading people about what is in the Agreement."

Ms. Fearon said that no party, including the Women's Coalition, got everything it wanted in the Agreement. "But it is wrong to take isolated elements and suggest they represent the Agreement as a whole."

"For example, the DUP claimed at the Forum that nationalist parties will have a veto on key decisions in the Assembly. They neglected to mention that unionist parties will have the same veto."

"We are proud of our contributions to the final agreement. We played an important role as facilitators and we contributed a number of key articles to the Agreement," she added.

These include: provision for a Civic Forum to work alongside the new Assembly; recognition of women's right to full and equal political participation; a commitment to meaningful support for the needs of victims; recognition of the contribution of integrated education to the work of reconciliation; and recognition of the importance of community development to stability and social inclusion.

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