



# Liberal Democrats

## FAX

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Message (if any):

*Richard sent his congratulations on a brilliant performance in the States - Now off on holiday. He'll be back on 12/2/94*

*Iain*

PRESS RELEASE

(Lord Holme L.D Spokesman etc.)

The situation in Northern Ireland is now very precarious. Thanks to the government's mishandling and to Gerry Adams' propaganda coup in the United States, the limelight has been allowed to focus much longer and more intensely on the IRA than it should.

The primary issue for peace is not now and has never been, this splinter group of terrorists, horrifying as their activities undoubtedly are. In that sense the Hume-Adams initiation was a sideshow not the main event. For the real substantive issue is whether the Unionist and Nationalist communities in Northern Ireland can confront and understand each others' fears and find a way to share power and work together.

That is why the Secretary of State is right, albeit belatedly, to shift the focus back onto what was Strand One of the original talks, the internal settlement in Northern Ireland. The Joint Declaration provides a good backdrop for talks between the constitutional parties - and Sinn Fein can join in if and when Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness cut out the waffling and stop shooting for good.

However Sir Patrick Mayhew must make sure the proposals he puts forward for the future governance of Northern Ireland are genuinely radical, and that they represent a fresh start.

Liberal Democrats will judge them on three criteria.

- First, they provide for devolved government in Northern Ireland, based on genuine power-sharing?
- Second, do they provide protection for individual and minority rights, through a Bill or Charter of Rights?
- Third, do they recognise the legitimacy of both communities' aspirations for the future, whilst ensuring no change in the status of Northern Ireland is ever made in the future without the consent of the majority of the province in a referendum.

The Unionists and Nationalists will both have to compromise if there is to be a constructive settlement. Unionists will have to share power with Nationalists and respect their rights, and agree to sensible cross-border cooperation.

Nationalists for their part will have to accept that their legitimate aim of a united Ireland is a long-term aspiration to be won over many years by peaceful consent and cooperation rather than a realisable immediate goal.