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The strategy remains in place, and this is a good time to restate it, to take note of what has been achieved, and to look forward once again, to a future that can be much better still.

To set all that out is my purpose today.

The Government's aims

What the government is trying to achieve remains the same: our aims are twofold, and inseparably linked:

- to secure lasting peace in Northern Ireland, and
- to help the people of Northern Ireland reach a just, comprehensive political settlement, founded on consent right across the community.

We share the view held by so many people that the prospects of success are greater today than they have ever been.

What has been achieved?

We cannot say with assurance yet that we have lasting peace. That assurance can only come from others. But the cessation of violence, horribly blemished though it has been by cruel beatings, intimidation and expulsions perpetrated by terrorists on both sides, has enabled a dramatic and ready response in two quarters in particular. I am of course referring first to the reduction in the security forces' presence and the changes in the way they operate in upholding the rule of law; and secondly, to the vast improvement in the image of Northern Ireland in the minds of the overseas investor, with all that that implies for jobs and therefore for stability in the Province. It is hard to say which of the two is more welcome to the people of Northern Ireland. What is certain is that they complement one another, and that there is the potential for each to be developed further.



Security forces

It is right to remember today and always all those whose commitment to peace and democracy has been unwavering over the last 25 years - the vast majority of ordinary citizens, the politicians who have abided by the ballot box alone, the churches. Most of all we owe a great debt to the members of the security forces. I pay a special tribute to them today. Their commitment, dedication and sacrifice, in the face of sustained attack, preserved the basis of law and order and democracy which is the only basis on which we can build a secure future. That we now have the opportunity of peace is due in high degree to their steadfastness and discipline over so many years.

Victims

Nor must we ever forget the victims of the violence. The suffering which is the result of 25 years of violence is still there in the minds and bodies of so many people in Northern Ireland, and further afield. Time can never remove the hurt; for many it is as fresh and painful after 25 years as after one year.

The sufferings were never all on one side. There has been the suffering of those who have seen a life wrongfully and tragically cut short, and the suffering of those whose bodies and futures have been maimed by the violence of others. There has also been the suffering of those who have seen the promise and hope of a young life diverted needlessly into the cul-de-sac of violence and prison.

No one, looking back over the past 25 years, can deny that there should have been a better way. It was fundamentally and deeply wrong for political disputes, however well-founded, to be carried in a democratic society to the point where people were killed and maimed, families torn apart and many left with terrible memories.

An important part of the healing process, assuaging the suffering and hurts of the past 25 years born by the people of Northern Ireland, may yet lie in some permanent means being found to remember



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these by, which itself would also symbolise the yearning for a better future. Above all else, recollection is for each of us in our own way and our own time. We must always feel with those who will always grieve.

Tributes

At the same time, it is right to recognise that the decisions announced last year were the result of much personal hard work and commitment by individuals on all sides and that these decisions have contributed significantly to the beneficial developments of the last year. They had come to realise that violence offered no solution and that there was instead an opportunity to seek a political solution through dialogue and agreement.

One year on, it is right to pay tribute to all those throughout these islands, and in both parts of the community, who strove and argued courageously for peace, for a better way of living together and for a fair political settlement reached at the conference table, rather than through the barrel of a gun.

Regret

Each of us should and must learn from the suffering and mistakes of the past. Most of all we must each examine our own record, and learn from our mistakes. As I said at Coleraine, in a speech in December 1992, and as I reiterate with even greater emphasis today:

"You will not find me seeking to argue that Britain's role in this island has only ever been associated with what has been uplifting. On the contrary, there is much in the long and often tragic history of Ireland for deep regret, and the British Government for its part shares in that regret to the full."

If there is to be a genuine healing process, it cannot be one-sided. The lesson of the last 25 years is that no one has gained from violence and all have cause to regret it. I therefore

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have welcomed those words of regret or remorse which have been spoken by some of those who have been involved in violence. They could valuably be joined by others.

But, having mutually acknowledged our regret, it is also right that we move on - move on to put the shared, malign legacy of history behind us and to say a heart-felt "never again".

Achieving Lasting Peace

Let me turn then to how the Government is playing its part in achieving a peace that will last.

First, I want to address fears that I know are held on both sides of the community.

There is the fear - articulated most by unionists but not by any means shared only by them - that too high a price will be paid for peace.

It will not. We shall not sacrifice our principles. We have not done so - the evidence shows it. We shall not do so in the future.

The principle of consent

What has been the principle that runs through Government policy? It is the principle of consent. It has always been our position and our promise that Northern Ireland will remain part of the United Kingdom while that is the wish of a majority of its people. It was a theme I set out in that speech in Coleraine in December 1992 when I said:

"We are committed, warmly, solemnly and steadfastly, to honouring our commitment to the wishes of a majority in Northern Ireland."



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Our determination to uphold that principle has not changed. What has changed is that the principle of consent has now become accepted as a fundamental ingredient of any lasting settlement. There now exists, I believe, broad agreement, both in the North and in the Republic and therefore throughout the people of this island, that there could only be a united Ireland if a majority of people in each jurisdiction wanted it.

Equally, we have accepted a binding obligation that the Government will introduce the necessary legislation to give effect, in the words of the Joint Declaration of December 1993, to "any measure of agreement on future relationships in Ireland which the people living in Ireland may themselves freely so determine without external impediment."

A just political settlement

Running side by side with this golden thread of the principle of consent has been our search for a fair political accommodation achieved through dialogue and agreement. It has been a long search. Often we have been exhorted, from one side or another, to cut corners, to impose a settlement, to apply the politics of coercion. But we have resisted these pressures.

What we seek is an accommodation, freely arrived at, without pressure or coercion from anyone, and without external impediment. The best guarantee of that is the Prime Minister's undertaking that any settlement agreed by the parties will be put to the people of Northern Ireland in a referendum before it is approved by Parliament. That is the guarantee that there can be no secret deals, no slippery slope, no subversion of democracy. The people of Northern Ireland have the future in their hands, which is as it should be.

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The rejection of violence

Finally, we have stood firm throughout 25 years of conflict in our rejection of violence. The people of Northern Ireland have great experience of standing firm against violence. 50 years on, we recall the invaluable contribution of Northern Ireland - and indeed of so many Irish men and women from the Republic - to the defeat of Nazi and Japanese terror in Europe and Asia.

Today, we remain determined that the psychology of conflict and intimidation - for too long embedded in parts of our community - must be entirely overturned. There is no acceptable level of violence or the threat of violence. That means it is not acceptable to set out to provoke criminal disorder. There is no acceptable level of punishment beatings, nor arson attacks on Protestant and Roman Catholic churches, church halls, Orange Halls and other places of community significance as well as private homes. There is no acceptable level of illegal arms holdings. All are unacceptable in a democratic society. Those who are responsible for these actions must continue to be brought to justice.

What we seek - and what, I believe, the vast majority of everyday people in Northern Ireland want us to seek - is a peace in which the principles of a democratic society are fully upheld. This we intend to achieve, because there can be no co-existence with violence.

So much for the fear, therefore, that we shall pay too high a price for peace.

The Government's commitment and record: no change of heart

The second fear I wish to address is a contrary fear. It is that we are about to let slip through our fingers, for want of vision and commitment, or through inertia, a genuine opportunity for a fair and lasting peace.



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I want there to be no doubt that the British Government is fully committed to building on such peace as we have experienced over the past year. It is at the top of the Government's agenda. Over the past five years the Prime Minister has personally and repeatedly demonstrated his commitment to Northern Ireland, and his determination to work for progress.

Any responsible Government, seeing this opportunity to replace conflict with peace and to build an agreed political accommodation for its citizens, would be under a clear duty to seize it.

That is why, at times when terrorism remained at its height and few thought that any sort of cessation was achievable, the British Government set out again and again the route that was open to all parties to participate in political dialogue, if only violence came to an end and democracy and exclusively peaceful methods were unequivocally espoused.

It was why, despite the political risks involved, this message was conveyed clearly to the Republican movement. It was why we engaged, over some months, with the Irish Government in reaching agreement on a statement of principles in the Joint Declaration of December 1993. This clearly set out the two Governments' view that violence was unnecessary and unjustified, and it demonstrated how those who had supported it could come to enter political dialogue.

It was why, despite the clarity of the Declaration itself, we were prepared when Sinn Fein put specific questions to us, to address these questions seriously and to urge Sinn Fein to take the opportunity offered by the Joint Declaration.

Each of these steps reflected a positive decision by the British Government - to which it holds today - that any honourable opportunity for peace should be thoroughly explored. There would not be a peace process today had not the British Government been prepared, at a time when terrible violence continued, to play its full part in the search for a peace justly and properly attained.



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I say this not to claim sole credit for ourselves - I readily acknowledge that others have played an important part, particularly the past and present Irish Governments with which we have worked closely. But I say it in order to demonstrate the determination and flexibility which the Government has already brought to the search for peace. Having come so far, against so many odds, in the face of such difficult obstacles, there will be no change of heart. We shall not abandon the search for progress. We shall seek it through every acceptable avenue available, until there is a lasting and secure peace in which all can have confidence. We reject, and with disgust, any claim that the peace process is dead. We have no interest whatever in frustrating, delaying or stalling genuine progress towards lasting peace. We have not done that and we will not do it. That would be a total abdication of our responsibilities and trust.

Responsive change

I am thankful that our record shows that in every area - security, economic and social issues, and in political dialogue - we have taken steps to respond to the opportunity created by the ceasefires, and to bring about changes upon which a better future can be built.

Security

The responses we have made are not concessions: far from it. But they are certainly consequences. At Coleraine I set out clearly the steps we would take in the event of a cessation of violence, when I said:

"In the event of a genuine and established cessation of violence, the whole range of responses that we have had to make to that violence could, and would, inevitably be looked at afresh." I added, "The preventive measures that have been such a necessary part of everyday life in the Province could be relaxed dramatically."



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We have made more than a start with that process. We have removed all border road closure orders; the broadcasting restrictions have been lifted; the policy which imposed restrictions on the funding of community groups has been withdrawn; no one is now legitimately excluded from Northern Ireland, and the numbers excluded by order from Great Britain have been reduced significantly. And, twelve months on from the ceasefire, many physical security measures have been removed, most security-related parking restrictions lifted, and the Belfast Civilian Search Unit has been wound up.

I also set out how security force deployments would respond to an end of violence:

"The routine support of the armed forces would no longer be required: the Army could return to its garrison role, as in the rest of the United Kingdom."

Now there has indeed been a dramatic reduction in the Army's presence on the streets: routine military patrol support to the police has fallen by 75%, and the Army no longer routinely patrols in Belfast, Londonderry and many other parts of the Province. Two Army battalions have already been relocated from Northern Ireland, and a major security force base vacated.

While peace lasts, this process of reducing Army support to the police will continue, with the full support of the Chief Constable and the GOC. Consideration is already being given to the relocation of further Army units from Northern Ireland over the course of the autumn and, providing peace continues to develop, I expect that process to continue.

Twenty months before the ceasefire, in the same speech, I also said:

"Freed from the threat of death at every corner, the Royal Ulster Constabulary would be free to give fresh priority to the quality and accessibility of its service."

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That is being achieved. The responsiveness of the RUC to calls from the community has already improved dramatically. In these new circumstances extensive studies are underway, with the co-operation of the RUC, to ensure that the police service continues to be impartial, efficient and effective and accountable and responsive to the community. Adherence to these principles will ensure that the police meet people's need for safer communities, and achieve real reductions in crime and the fear of crime.

These issues are already being comprehensively addressed. The Government will publish a White Paper this Autumn, giving firm proposals for reforms to policing structures aimed at safeguarding the operational independence of the police, and engaging the community seriously on policing issues.

The RUC is itself, along with Government and the Police Authority, playing a leading role in a fundamental review of policing needs and services. This exercise will I hope lay the foundation for the police service of the future. The Police Authority, too, deserves congratulations for its community consultation initiative on policing. I look forward to the report, when that process is completed.

A climate of peace offers new opportunities for enhancing the identification of the community and individual communities with policing in Northern Ireland. Already, people have themselves begun to contemplate how they could play a part. I am heartened by these initiatives.

Emergency legislation

Similarly, I held out the prospect, 20 months before the ceasefire, that the emergency legislation on which many of the responses to paramilitary violence are founded would have served its purpose in the event of a genuine end to terrorism. That remains our hope. Already aspects of the emergency legislation are falling into



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disuse. Arrests under the Prevention of Terrorism Act for involvement in terrorist crime have fallen by some two thirds. The number of RUC and Army searches has dropped dramatically, from over 3,000 in 1994 to 164 during the first three months of 1995.

As peace continues, we shall be looking at all the options for such legislation itself and, as I said during the House of Commons debate on the renewal of the Emergency Provisions Act on 12 June, we shall be establishing a powerful, authoritative and independent review of the continuing need both for that Act, which applies only to Northern Ireland, and the Prevention of Terrorism Act which covers the UK as a whole. The latter of course relates to international terrorism as well as that connected with Northern Ireland. Careful consideration needs to be given to what legislation is needed in future. But on the assumption that peace continues in Northern Ireland, it is now our intention to begin the independent review as soon as possible. The process of replacing the legislation itself is not something which can be completed quickly, and almost certainly not before the present EPA expires next year, so some powers will have to continue on a temporary basis. But we will make a start and, as peace continues, our aim remains to return to policing the Province by the normal structures and procedures of the criminal law.

Prisoners

There are other measures, taken at the height of the terrorist violence, which it is now time to reconsider. In 1989 the rate of remission for those prisoners in Northern Ireland given long fixed sentences for terrorist-type offences was cut from 50% to 33%, while the remission rate for all other prisoners remained at 50%. That measure was taken in response to an upsurge in terrorist activity, and in order to strengthen the deterrence to those who might be minded to take up the gun and the bomb.

Let there be no doubt - we are not speaking here of what some term political prisoners. The UK has no such prisoners. We are speaking



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of those properly convicted in the courts of serious crimes of terrorist violence, often resulting in agonising death and horrendous injuries to innocent victims, including those impelled to act as human bombs, young children and old men and women. Those who are the surviving victims of such crimes, and society as a whole, rightly expect protection and retribution. The mere ending of violence cannot erase the murder and maiming of thousands of innocent people, nor can it erase the crimes of those responsible for perpetrating such evil deeds.

Yet, one year on, the absence of terrorist violence has transformed life in Northern Ireland. It has transformed the situation into which prisoners are released. For the first time in 25 years, our young people are growing up in a situation in which they are not tempted with the call to arms. They should not face the temptation of involvement in such criminal activity. The need for the increased measures of 1989 has therefore dramatically reduced.

Providing there is not in the meantime a resumption of terrorist violence which would restore the need for stronger measures, I shall therefore seek early legislation which would enable those already serving sentences for terrorist offences to be released after they have served 50% of their sentence. This would mean that all fixed sentence prisoners in Northern Ireland could be released from prison at the same point in their sentence.

This is certainly no amnesty - no emptying of the jails - as some commentators have sought to portray it. But nor is it the insignificant gesture which others have tried to label it in advance. It is both significant and real. It is certainly significant to the over 100 prisoners almost equally from both Republican and Loyalist traditions who would benefit in the first year. Nor is it insignificant for another 300 who would ultimately benefit. It would in very tangible terms be a real benefit of the developing peace.



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Prisoners convicted of such dangerous crimes should not, however, be released earlier into society - despite the new situation created by the ceasefires - without some protection against those who might pose a danger to the public. The legislation that I envisage will therefore allow for such releases to be on condition that those released remain of good behaviour until the two-thirds point is reached and do not commit further criminal acts. If they breach these conditions during the periods they would otherwise have served they will be recalled to prison. Furthermore, against the possibility that the ceasefires break down, there will be a provision enabling me to end the scheme. Subject to Parliament's approval.

As for life sentence prisoners, the existing procedure already takes into account a number of criteria, one of which is the risk of re-offending in the case of the individual prisoner concerned. Should the ceasefires continue, this will therefore be a factor which it would be perfectly proper for the Life Sentence Review Board, and I as Secretary of State, to take into account in assessing this risk.

The possible measures I have announced relate to the special provisions for the treatment of prison sentences taken in Northern Ireland in response to the violence here. Such measures have not been necessary in Great Britain, and there are therefore no implications from what I have announced for the treatment of sentences in Great Britain. But we shall continue to operate our transfer policy, flexibly and compassionately, so that, consistent with the interests of justice, prisoners serve their sentences close to their families.

This new proposal recognises the change a year of peace has brought. But it depends on its continuation. I am in no doubt that, as Parliament considers this legislation through the autumn and into 1996, its passage will be unable to proceed if serious doubts start to arise about the continuation of the ceasefires.



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But, while peace continues, its benefits can and will flow to all parts of society.

So much, therefore, for fears of unresponsive inertia on the part of the Government.

Resulting benefits for the economy

Now let me point to what peace has already achieved in other quarters.

We want to see the economic benefits of peace flowing out to all parts of society on a fair and equal basis. This was another theme I emphasised at Coleraine:

"With the removal of fear and terrorist oppression, moreover, the whole community would, I believe, quite soon find the confidence and determination to pave the way to political, social and economic betterment on a scale which we have not so far experienced."

Already we have seen evidence of that hope becoming a reality. Unemployment is falling - down by 10,000; jobs are increasing - up by 12,000; Northern Ireland is an increasingly attractive location for inward investment. Visits by potential inward investors have risen by nearly 40%, and 10 investments with the potential for 2,000 jobs have been announced even since last summer. Holiday visitors to all parts of Northern Ireland are up by over 50%. The Prime Minister's conference in Belfast last December enhanced Northern Ireland's profile as an attractive location for the whole world.

The international community has given our policies wholehearted support, and recognised the opportunities now for Northern Ireland which peace has brought. The White House conference in May gave a valued stimulus to promoting Northern Ireland as completely open for international business and tourism. The European Union's peace package will bring two hundred and forty million pounds additional



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investment to Northern Ireland and particularly to areas especially affected by the troubles. The valuable work of the International Fund for Ireland and its Board has been enhanced by further funding.

More investment still is needed. This will help increase the prosperity of society as a whole, but especially help the achievement of fair employment and make inroads into the continuing and unacceptable differential in unemployment between Catholic and Protestant males in particular.

There is therefore, across the economic and security fields, a continuing agenda of change. The Government has already done much, and is determined to do more, to consolidate the benefits of peace and ensure that they reach into all parts of Northern Ireland.

Resulting benefits for political progress

Equally the process of political dialogue, too, has been enabled to advance.

The ceasefires announced last year enabled us to enter into exploratory talks with Sinn Fein and with the PUP and UDP, in addition to the four parties involved in the 1992 talks. We undertook to open these exploratory dialogues within three months of the cessation of violence. We did so. We set out, well before the cessation of violence, what the purposes of those dialogues should be: how those parties could come to play a part in political talks, how they could play their full part in normal political life and to explore the practical consequences of the ending of violence.

Loyalists

Our dialogue with the PUP and the UDP has been productive and, I believe, of benefit to both sides. The Government recognises the role those parties played in bringing about the ceasefire announcement by the CLMC which, no less than the IRA cessation, was an essential component in the peace we now experience. We have



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valued the serious, responsible and frank approach which both parties have brought to the dialogue. It has been possible to discuss a wide range of issues across a broad agenda. Most particularly, both parties have articulated their belief that a positive approach to the treatment of prisoners could itself consolidate the ceasefires. The change I have proposed today in the treatment of sentences has benefited from the responsible thinking which these parties have contributed. We look forward to continuing constructive exchanges with them and we wish to secure their participation in political dialogue.

Sinn Fein

Our exploratory dialogue with Sinn Fein, although we entered it with the determination that it, too, should be productive, and should serve to advance rather than stall Sinn Fein's entry into full and normal political life, has been more intermittent. The divisions of suspicion and mistrust have not been so easy to bridge. I regret that it has not been possible to have a more productive and constructive dialogue - whether with my officials or across the table from Michael Ancram, the Minister for political development.

Nevertheless, while the ceasefires continue, we shall be ready and willing to engage in dialogue with Sinn Fein. For that purpose, accompanied by Michael Ancram, I saw Mr Adams and Mr McGuinness twice in July. Those meetings were helpful in exploring how we can overcome the obstacles to progress we each see. Suggestions were made by each side which require careful consideration. We have offered another meeting.

There must be no implicit threat

This stage is an essential preparation. We have to establish that all parties are working on the same equal basis without the threat of a return to violence. If political negotiations are to take place in a climate of trust and confidence, which is the necessary



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basis for lasting agreement, then all must be confident that the outcome will be determined alone by what goes on in the negotiating chamber, and the democratic wishes of the people.

There can be nothing more calculated to undermine this necessary confidence and trust than the fear that if one or other side does not get its way at the negotiating table, it will resort to force of arms.

That is why, in order to create that confidence, we have said that there must be substantial progress on the issue of decommissioning. That means, as I said in Washington in March:

"We shall be pressing to achieve three things:

- a willingness in principle to disarm progressively;
- a common practical understanding of the modalities, that is to say what decommissioning would actually entail;
- in order to test the practical arrangements, and to demonstrate good faith, decommissioning of some arms as a tangible confidence building measure and to signal the start of a process."

For our part we do not seek surrender. Nor are we dealing in concepts of victory or defeat. As we have long made clear, we retain an open mind on the modalities of how progress may be made. We recognise the difficulties and sensitivities that touch this issue. We approach it on a pragmatic basis intent not on scoring political points, but creating the climate of confidence necessary for political negotiations. Nor do we seek progress on this issue in isolation, but in parallel with our own continuing response to the ceasefires. We shall look with an open mind at any constructive proposal which offers a genuine prospect of securing the clear



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progress we seek; but that progress remains essential if we are to move in parallel to the substantive political dialogue which is our common goal.

Recognition of all electoral mandates

Equally, we wish through dialogue to find a way forward. We recognise all electoral mandates. We wish to find a way in which all parties - including Sinn Fein - can come together on the same equal basis in comprehensive negotiations.

That has been one of the purposes of our existing dialogue with Sinn Fein. We shall go on exploring with them and all the parties how the groundwork can best be laid. Let all others do likewise.

We shall go on seeking out every avenue for progress. The Prime Minister and the Taoiseach meet together again on 6 September for this very purpose.

A realistic vision for the future for Northern Ireland

Let me reflect in conclusion, on just what would be possible if more progress could be made on all these fronts over the coming year towards a lasting peace.

It would mean a Northern Ireland free for ever of terrorist violence - and free of the enormous cost in lives and suffering which that brings.

It would mean, too, a Northern Ireland in which the threat of a return to that violence - with all the fears that engenders - would have been banished along with the illegal arms.

It would mean a Northern Ireland in which the army presence would be reduced to normal peacetime garrison levels, as in any other part of the United Kingdom. The armed troops deployed in the streets and