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Speech by Marjorie Mowlam MP Shadow Northern Ireland Secretary

Delivered in Armagh

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There was a great deal of interest shown when I spoke last month in Garvagh - I'm sure the same interest will not be expressed again - sadly.

As I know you will agree, it is important to talk and to listen with both traditions in Northern Ireland. I will continue to do that.

Before speaking in Garvagh, I had been to Armagh to speak to Seamus Mallon - a politician for whom I have incredible respect - and not only because of his courage as a constitutional politician - a role which is easier in some parts of Northern Ireland than others - and here it is tough.

Seamus, his family and his party colleagues have exhibited that courage.

It is the courage of constitutional politicians, like Seamus, John Hume, Eddie McGrady and Joe Hendron along with the courage of the people of Northern Ireland that has brought us to this position today.

We can never forget the individuals and their families who have lost their lives in the course of the troubles - from both sides of the community and the security forces.

For you here in Co Armagh - the brutal killings of Charles and Teresa Fox in Moy in 1992

- ▶ or Terence McConville in Portadown
- ▶ or James Gray in Conscriebe.
- ▶ or the soldiers, Daniel Blinco, Paul Garrett, Kevin Pullin, and John Randall.

And the dreadful list goes on.

For far too long the whole of Northern Ireland has been a place of fear, division and conflict. The Anglo Irish Agreement and the Downing Street Declaration, the ceasefire and the peace process have begun to change that.

The events of last week were monumental.

After two years of painstaking work the Governments' produced the framework document and the proposals for the Northern Ireland Assembly. As you will have seen, it received a warm welcome from the vast majority of Members of the House of Commons.

Like me, they believe that the framework document offers the best chance to work for reconciliation and a lasting peace in Northern Ireland.

The publication of the framework document heralds a new stage in the peace process, one which will ensure all parties have the opportunity to contribute to a just and lasting settlement.

It is a finely balanced text which offers victory to no community and betrays no tradition. It is a balanced challenge to all. No one should be afraid of talking - everyone has to give something - that is the only pre-condition to talks.

The move towards the next stage - talks - is now crucial.

Much depends on the developing reaction amongst the unionist politicians. They have found the language employed in the document very disconcerting but in the end it is the content which matters.

They should not see it as a slippery slope, but as a starting point, a basis for negotiation. What they must do is trust in themselves and in the guarantees in place in the framework document.

In the pursuit of a balanced and peaceful settlement, the document doesn't threaten either tradition in Northern Ireland

A peaceful accommodation between both communities based upon agreement is the only hope for a positive future. Now whether that future is in the Union or with the Republic will be up to the people to decide by peaceful and democratic means.

Like the Downing Street Declaration, this document accepts that it is for the people of Ireland alone to exercise their right to self determination on the basis of consent freely and concurrently given north and south.

That guarantees for northern nationalists that a united Ireland can occur if a majority so determine and reassures unionists that they will remain in the UK as long as that is a position supported by a majority of the people of Northern Ireland.

The Government in the Republic have offered to change their constitution to reflect the fact

that Northern Ireland will remain outside their jurisdiction unless and until a majority of the population living in Northern Ireland choose otherwise. This is a major step in assisting and facilitating the peace process.

Not enough credit has been given to the stance taken by the Irish Government - not only for proposing these constitutional changes, but also for the willingness of their politicians to acknowledge the aspirations and traditions of the unionist community in Northern Ireland

The British Government will introduce the qualification of consent into their claim to jurisdiction over Northern Ireland.

They have also set out a framework for a new Northern Ireland Assembly based upon proportional representation and incorporating the principles of power sharing and weighted voting to ensure that no community can dominate the other.

I hope that unionists will eventually accept the assurances that the proposals for the North/South body are not a blueprint for joint authority. As the Prime Minister made clear, it is a proposal for co-operation by agreement between Northern Ireland's representatives and their counterparts in Dublin.

Decisions could only be taken where there is agreement:

- ▶ Agreement between the political parties about the nature and status of the functions the body would oversee or discharge at the outset;
- ▶ agreement between the Assembly and the Dail over what further functions should be designated to it.

The body would be accountable to The Dail and the Assembly respectively, and populated by members of each institution.

The document also stresses the importance of the body in discharging European programmes and initiatives which are by their nature of an all-Ireland character. I know the importance that John and Seamus have placed upon European initiatives and will have been pleased to see this recognition of the significance of European links with Ireland in the Document.

Labour have stressed all along that it is entirely sensible that these arrangements are securely and appropriately guaranteed by both governments.

These elements are crucial to establishing a balanced constitutional settlement.

The document also contains other vital features which recognise that a new, agreed accommodation must be built upon a foundation of equal respect for the traditions and aspirations of both communities. That is, to embrace the principles of parity of esteem, equality of treatment and mutual recognition.

As Seamus has stressed for many years, the composition of the security services is of major concern for the underlying stability of the peace process - in his words,

"...the political and policing problems of Northern Ireland are intertwined and interlocked - we cannot solve one in isolation from the other."

I'm sure he will agree with me that the Government's recognition, in the Framework Document that a new "climate of peace" holds "new possibilities and opportunities for enhancing community identification with policing in Northern Ireland" is very welcome.

An agreed and accountable police service is an essential element in every democratic society. There can be no place for vigilantes in either community holding themselves up as judge and jury and carrying out horrific and permanently disabling punishments.

We believe that both symbolic changes - like the name - and structural changes are needed to help achieve that degree of "community identification".

I know Seamus has accused the Police Authority of being "toothless quango" - I believe it should be given some teeth.

- ▶ The role of the Police Authority should be enhanced, not marginalised, it would be wrong to limit the Authority's oversight merely to community as opposed to security policing - more than ever the two are inter-linked and inter-dependent;
- ▶ The complaints system needs to be reformed and strengthened and the Independent Commission for Police Complaints for Northern Ireland given the right to initiate and supervise non-complaint cases in grave and exceptional circumstances;
- ▶ The community Police Liaison Committees need to be developed further and it should be possible for the Police to develop better informal links with other community groups and to utilise the expertise of the Community Relations Council.

These are just a few suggestions, but I welcome the commitment in the framework document and look forward to constructive and productive debate on all sides on this issue. One feels up to now that there is some agreement over the analysis of the problem but very few positive policy recommendations.

The framework document also contained significant proposals on the question of both individual and collective rights.

We welcome the Government's explicit undertaking to ensure the systematic and effective protection of common specified civil, political, social and cultural rights.

And we welcome the Government's encouragement for a Covenant to protect fundamental rights including the right to equal opportunity in all social and economic activity, regardless of class, creed, gender or colour.

I have to say, its a shame they don't recognise the significance of those rights in Britain too!

Fair Employment provisions are an important part of making equal opportunities a reality.

We won the battle to persuade the Government to transfer responsibility for the review of Fair Employment measures from the Government's Central Community Relations Unit to the more independent Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights.

Now we want SACHR to address important matters such as improving existing measures for tackling discrimination and the need to identify new measures and programmes to achieve targeted and identifiable change.

Since one or two other things were happening on Wednesday afternoon, the fact that an important change to the Fair Employment legislation was passed - removing the ceiling on compensation for victims of discrimination on religious grounds - may have been overlooked!

This was a particularly important for me as it was one of the amendments that I moved to the original Act.

Labour will be pressing for other changes to the legislation in the coming months. We will be introducing private members' bills for example to:

- ▶ remove the restrictions on targeting new investment on the long-term unemployed;
- ▶ to make taking equality of opportunity into account a statutory obligation on governmental bodies;
- ▶ to place a statutory responsibility on the IDB to take equality of opportunity into account in determining the siting of new industries.

Labour has taken a lead in agreement with the SDLP and many others that the Government has no clear overall strategy for economic development in Northern Ireland.

Unemployment in Northern Ireland is a matter for great and urgent concern - running at almost 17% in Newry and Armagh. The Government must recognise that the future stability of the peace process in Northern Ireland is, in part, dependent on employment opportunities available to all in Northern Ireland.

With the new investment money from the United States and from Europe along with redirected public resources the Government should be able to construct an overall package that:

- ▶ addresses the immediate problems of long-term unemployment;
- ▶ sets out a programme for sustainable growth and investment that includes help for small businesses, a unified framework for skills training and encouragement for

companies to undertake research and development;

- ▶ and includes measures to ease the transition from welfare into work and improve the availability of affordable childcare.

Crucial to these programmes being developed is that the European money will be truly additional and we will be watching carefully to see that the Government does not make corresponding cuts in its own expenditure.

The economy needs to be regenerated to create new jobs and new opportunities in Northern Ireland and restructured too - to take account of the new situation of peace.

Local Authorities like Armagh and Newry & Mourne have an important role to play in local economic development, in creating jobs, in participating in social and economic growth in their areas and in building constructive partnerships with the private sector.

Improving consultation and partnership with local authorities would be particularly helpful in operating projects like the community work programmes or in rural development programmes - of particular importance in this part of the province.

Tourism too is a rapidly expanding area of economic activity where closer co-operation with local authorities would greatly assist in the allocation of public funds.

It is also important that local authorities recognise their political responsibilities. Councils like Newry and Mourne lead the way in operating power sharing policies - a tribute to the SDLP group on the council.

To some local companies in County Armagh the concept of North/South trade and co-operation is nothing new.

Companies like:

- ▶ Thomas McLaughlin and Son - major suppliers of equipment to hoteliers and caterers in the Republic - based here in Armagh, with offices in both Belfast and Dublin:
- ▶ or Tayto (Northern Ireland) Ltd who sell snack products all over Ireland - North and South.

Businesses in Armagh and all over Northern Ireland recognise that greater co-operation between North and South is simply common sense.

As John Hume has established, agreement is the essential principle in overcoming the divisions in Northern Ireland and in building a lasting, stable and prosperous peace.

I cannot emphasise enough Labour's support for that principle.

Both Governments have guaranteed that any new settlement must be widely agreed by the Northern Ireland political parties and given the consent of the people of Northern Ireland and the consent of the politicians at Westminster.

As the next Government in Westminster - hopefully sooner rather than later - we have promised to uphold that guarantee.

We have said that whatever party is in government in Westminster, this process will continue, pursued with the same patience and determination, and motivated by the same desire for peace.

Both Governments have made clear that the Framework document proposes rather than imposes. It is a sell out to neither side. It recognises the importance of the nation while simultaneously acknowledging that national solutions in themselves are not necessarily desirable. What the document is saying - particularly for unionists - is that a new agreed Ireland is not the same as a united Ireland.

We have said that our door is open to any party that wishes to talk.

The door to the house of peace has also been opened - the Downing Street Declaration, the ceasefires, and now the Framework document have seen to that. Now we must step over the threshold, begin the talks and negotiate our way into the future.

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