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THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

February 28, 1996

STATEMENT BY THE PRESS SECRETARY

National Security Adviser Anthony Lake and Northern Ireland's Alliance Party leader Dr. John Alderdice met yesterday evening for close to an hour to discuss the Northern Ireland peace process. The Vice President had been scheduled to join them but was unable to do so.

Mr. Lake and Dr. Alderdice expressed their support for the intensive efforts of the Irish and British Governments to get the cease-fire restored and move the peace process forward. They looked forward to the anticipated summit between Prime Ministers Major and Bruton to announce a path to negotiations for a just and lasting settlement. Mr. Lake reiterated the Administration's commitment to work with the two governments and the parties to achieve that goal.

Mr. Lake and Dr. Alderdice agreed that violence must not be allowed to derail the peace process and frustrate the desire of the people of Northern Ireland for a normal life for themselves and their children. That desire has been demonstrated time and again, most recently by the mass vigil for peace held throughout Northern Ireland and Ireland on Sunday. Mr. Lake expressed appreciation for Dr. Alderdice's contribution to the cause of peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland.

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STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

I welcome the announcement made today by British Prime Minister Major and Irish Prime Minister Bruton of a path to negotiations for a just and lasting settlement in Northern Ireland. I want to express my admiration for these two leaders, who have shown so much courage and determination in the cause of peace. The clear path they have laid out leads to inclusive talks on the future of Northern Ireland, once the cease-fire has been restored. I am convinced that this is the path supported by the overwhelming majority of the people of Northern Ireland, who have so resoundingly rejected violence and embraced peace. I call on those who have resorted to violence to heed the voice of the people and cease their campaign of terror.

The process that Prime Ministers Bruton and Major have announced will begin with intensive consultations among the governments and the parties to reach agreement on a broadly acceptable elective process, which will lead directly and without preconditions to all-party negotiations by June 10, 1996. The consultations, to begin early next month, will also address the framework for those negotiations and whether to hold a referendum on support for the peace process. I hope all the parties will commit themselves to participate fully in the process announced today in order to create the lasting peace the people of Northern Ireland deserve.

The United States remains fully committed to supporting the search for peace in which the two governments, the parties and the people of Northern Ireland have invested so much. I will remain in close touch with Prime Ministers Major and Bruton, who know they have my full support in their pursuit of peace. We will continue to work with the parties in the same cause.

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