

Draft letter for signature by the Prime Minister

Albert Reynolds TD

An Taoiseach

Dublin

I am attaching a fresh text to this letter, which explains why I think this text now offers the best way of taking forward our joint commitment to explore the opportunity for peace in Northern Ireland.

When we spoke on the telephone last weekend we touched on a number of issues which were making the climate for progress on the proposed Joint Declaration rather stormy. As I said to you then, the leak on Friday to the Irish Press of the draft Liaison Group paper your officials had prepared was deeply damaging in the eyes of many unionists. John Hume's misjudged statement with Gerry Adams on Saturday simply exacerbated their anxieties in a most unhelpful way.

I know that you understand these points. If I may say so, I thought your interview on Breakfast with Frost did go a long way to calm fears, and underline our joint belief that there is an opportunity we should try to take to secure peace, and to take forward the political talks process. I know you have had to take some risks already to come this far, and I deeply appreciate that. As I said in my Guildhall speech, all concerned will have to show courage, court unpopularity, break down old barriers, and take risks to reach our goal of a complete cessation of violence. I am ready to do that. But we must be sure that the effort is worthwhile.

Candidly, I have concluded that the Joint Declaration in its present form is fatally undermined by its association with the Hume/Adams process. The more the popular imagination links our own efforts to that process, and the more John Hume and Gerry Adams talk about it going on, the more difficult it becomes to remove the taint - and taint is, unfortunately, how many unionists (not just Ian Paisley) see the connection. Of course, you were right in saying that our work has a separate origin, but frankly we are never going to be able to convince the people that that is so.

I am certainly not suggesting that we should abandon what we are doing. It is too important for that. We do need to finesse this difficulty though. My own view is that we can do that if we proceed on the basis of the new text which I am attaching to this letter.

You will see that it incorporates almost all of the existing language from the Joint Declaration, including the suggestions made by Archbishop Eames, but it sets it in a different surround. The fresh elements are designed in particular to set this initiative in the context of our commitment to take the talks process forward, to draw on the words we both used in our Brussels statement - and those in my Guildhall speech, and to allow me to make an explicit public statement of the constitutional guarantee to Northern Ireland.

I imagine that, even in this context, such a text will still produce some turbulence in Northern Ireland. People will say that I have gone too far. On the other hand I believe that it has to be far enough to persuade the Provisionals to face the challenge, abandon their violence and join those who take the democratic road. If you judge that this text could be the basis for that to happen, I am prepared to proceed with it at our meeting in December.

As to the mechanics of the process, it is vital that I should be able to say that this text has not been negotiated with the Provisionals. If we can agree on it then it could - as I believe you intended anyway - be put to them on a take it or leave it basis.

[Sir Robin Butler] will explain further the thinking which has led me to make this proposal, and he will stand ready to discuss the text with Mr Nally should you have further suggestions of your own to make.

The historic opportunity you referred to in your last letter to me does exist. Let us hope others will grasp it with us.

1. It is clear, in the Prime Minister's judgement, that it would be extremely difficult to bring the Joint Declaration in its present form to a successful conclusion. The enormous hopes which have been generated are matched by anxieties and suspicions on the part of unionists.
2. The Prime Minister believes that there are several unhelpful factors at work:

the hostile climate (at least as far as unionists are concerned) ever since the Hume/Adams démarche of 25 September