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BELFAST NEWSLETTER

The Joint Declaration which Albert Reynolds and I agreed in Downing Street nearly three weeks ago sets out a clear challenge to the provisional movement. If they renounce violence - for good - and show they mean it, then Sinn Fein have the clear prospect of entering into the talks process with the other constitutional parties. But the onus is on them. They must choose whether they have the courage to end violence and enter into democratic politics. If they decide to continue their campaign of violence, they will do so in the knowledge that they are isolated and will face opposition from the two governments, from all the constitutional parties in Northern Ireland, and from the overwhelming majority of the people of Northern Ireland.

I very much hope that the provisional movement will see sense and renounce violence. Regrettably, they have not yet done so. They continue to seek "clarification" of the Joint Declaration - a tactic which should be seen for what it is: an increasingly desperate attempt to avoid facing up to the clear choice that confronts them. And, after a brief pause over Christmas, the IRA have continued their campaign of violence, as the murder of a young soldier in Crossmaglen last week reminded us only too clearly, together with the attempted murders and firebombs over the weekend.

The provisionals face this choice at a time when there is increasing determination among the people of Northern Ireland to end 25 years of violence and see peace restored. Over recent months, both Patrick Mayhew and I have had many talks with political leaders from Northern Ireland, with churchmen, with community leaders, with businessmen and with many others. I have had an opportunity in three recent visits to Northern Ireland to meet a wide variety of people. All these contacts will continue. I have been impressed and heartened by the support we have had for our efforts to work for peace and for

a political settlement. That encouraged me in the negotiations with the Irish government over the Joint Declaration. If we all continue to work together, we can keep the momentum going.

The Joint Declaration sets out the framework for bringing about peace and reconciliation. In the name of both governments it restates in unequivocal terms the fundamental principles and guarantees that mean so much to all sides of the community in both parts of Ireland. In terms more comprehensive than ever before it sets out the philosophy which underpins the actions of both governments. It places great emphasis on the need to respect the different traditions of the communities in Northern Ireland.

I understand the concerns of those in Northern Ireland who are cautious when faced with an initiative of this sort. But I strongly believe that when they read the Joint Declaration - as I hope everyone will do - they will find that the interests of all communities are fully recognised and protected. Suggestions that the document is a sell-out to one set of interests or another are nonsense. Not only does the Declaration repeat in the clearest possible terms the British governments commitment to Northern Ireland's constitutional guarantee - that no change can come about without the consent of the greater number of people of Northern Ireland - but it also sets out the Irish Government's acceptance of that principle, while no less importantly recognising nationalist ideals.

The fact that the Declaration has the full support of the British and Irish Governments should make it clear to all that there is no way forward except through the democratic process. There is no place for terrorism, whether loyalist or republican. There is nothing that the men of violence, whatever cause they may claim to represent, can seriously believe they are able to achieve. They have achieved nothing worthwhile in 25 years of violence, and would achieve nothing worthwhile if it were to continue for another 25 years.

But with a permanent end to violence, and a commitment to the democratic process, Sinn Fein can enter into exploratory dialogue within three months. Without a permanent end to violence, the terrorists and their supporters will be isolated, with the British and Irish Governments and all the constitutional parties in Northern Ireland united against them.

Isolated, while the rest of us get on with our agenda for bringing about a political settlement via the talks process. I am determined that, come what may, we will pursue those talks with renewed vigour. The Taoiseach and I have already reaffirmed our support for the objectives of the talks process, involving political dialogue between the two governments and the main constitutional parties in Northern Ireland. That is the three stranded approach which made such progress in 1992: we must now make it a priority to reach agreement in 1994.

Strand 1 of the talks is concerned with setting up new forms of government within Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland needs a form of government that people can identify with, and where they can participate. A form of government that is fully accountable and commands support in all sections of the community. We are determined to restore properly based local democracy in Northern Ireland.

Strand 2 of the talks concerns relations between Northern Ireland and the South. I know there has been fear and suspicion that these parts of the talks involve giving the South a direct role in the internal affairs of Northern Ireland. They do not. It would be extraordinary if, as part of an overall political agreement, two countries sharing a border on an island did not look for ways to work together where that made sense to both. We each have so much to gain from co-operation across the border. That is what paragraph 9 of the Joint Declaration means when it talks of the two governments and the constitutional

parties in Northern Ireland creating through a process of political dialogue "institutions and structures which, while respecting the diversity of the people of Ireland, would enable them to work together in all areas of common interest".

I am under no illusion that it will prove easy to reach agreement on all these issues. But there is now a clear will on all sides to try to do so. And there is a positive benefit in the large task we have set ourselves. It is that once agreement is reached, it will be comprehensive, leaving no room for uncertainties or concerns about hidden agendas - uncertainties that can breed doubt, fear and instability. The prize at the end of the process is great: so great that we are all determined to succeed.

The prize lies not just in a political solution. But also in the economic transformation that that in turn would bring. Northern Ireland is already well placed to benefit from the economic upturn that is taking hold throughout the United Kingdom. But the prospect of long term political stability would bring renewed confidence in Northern Ireland as a site for inward investment, as a destination for tourism. Confidence that would itself encourage existing firms to invest and to expand. Confidence that would help accelerate a reduction in unemployment. There are huge opportunities, and great international goodwill.

So the British Government will continue to work towards achieving both peace and political reform in Northern Ireland. The opportunity is there. But at the same time, while terrorism continues, we will use every means we can to defeat it and bring those responsible to justice. The police and armed forces in Northern Ireland perform a difficult job with great skill, courage and sacrifice. They will continue to have our full support and backing in upholding the law and protecting the community.

We will continue to work for peace. But not peace at any price: there will be no departure from the fundamental principles we hold to - in particular that change in Northern Ireland can only come about with the consent of the greater number of the people. The Joint Declaration makes it clear that it is above all for the people of Northern Ireland to shape their future. There is now a framework which reflects the concerns and aspirations of both sides of the community. It is a framework that can shape a better future for Northern Ireland in 1994. Peace is there for the taking.

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