

NORTHERN IRELAND INFORMATION SERVICE
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The Prime Minister and the Taoiseach have issued their long-awaited joint communique which guarantees Northern Ireland position within the United Kingdom as long as the majority want it and proposes opening exploratory talks with the Provisional IRA within 3 months provided it renounces violence permanently. Tim Cook reports from Downing Street.

Tim Cook

After weeks of intense negotiations between Dublin and London this third meeting between Mr Major and Mr Reynolds in the space of a fortnight has been the decisive one. The two Premiers spent more than half-an-hour this morning putting the finishing touches to their declaration. They then emerged from Downing Street, the Taoiseach describing their agreement as an historic opportunity for peace. Mr Major said it contained no compromise on strongly held principles, it was time for violence to stop.

The declaration itself has just been published. On the British side it reiterates the constitutional guarantee and says it is for the people of the island of Ireland alone by agreement between the two parts respectively to exercise their right of self-determination on the basis of consent.

On the Republic side there is a commitment to support change in its constitution in the event of an overall settlement. The declaration says that if the violence ends democratically mandated parties can participate fully in dialogue.

Reaction to the declaration has come from all the main political parties here. The DUP leader Ian Paisley went to Downing Street to protest at the communique and he accused the Government of treachery.

Dr Ian Paisley
The declaration which you and Albert Reynolds sign and make public today is not between you and him alone. It is a tripartite agreement between Reynolds, the IRA and you. You have sold Ulster to buy off the fiendish Republican scum. You will learn in a bitter school that all appeasement of these monsters is self-destructive.

Joe Hendron of the SDLP says it's a historic day and he says the declaration does not represent a sell-out.

Dr Joe Hendron
There is no excuse, not that there was in the past, but there is no excuse now for the Provisional IRA not to call a total and absolute permanent ceasefire. The Prime Minister made it clear that within three months of a cessation of violence by the IRA that there will be preliminary discussions with Sinn Fein. I think that's the major step forward and obviously the Irish Government would go along with that as well.

John Taylor of the Ulster Unionists has urged people not to give a knee-jerk reaction to the declaration. He says they should read it carefully first.

John Taylor
The document isn't as bad as I had feared it might be. I am one who had expressed quite a few anxieties, concerns over the past few weeks, and if I could say this as a rather out-spoken Unionist and loyalist to our own people back in Northern Ireland: Read this document very carefully and don't jump too quickly to conclusions. There will be some people trying to misrepresent it; some people trying to scare you.

Interviewer
Dr Paisley?

John Taylor

I am not mentioning names. All I'm saying is if I am concerned about it I will say so, but at the moment I am saying read it carefully before you commit yourselves.

The Catholic and Church of Ireland Bishops of Clogher, Joseph Duffy and Brian Hannon, have issued a joint Christmas message of support and encouragement for the political leaders in their quest for peace. They said people could best promote a true and lasting peace by being scrupulous about the rights of the other side, by avoiding slogans and easy propaganda and by side-stepping no part of the problem.

The funeral will take place this afternoon of the second of the two policemen murdered by the IRA at Fivemiletown in Co Tyrone on Sunday. Reserve Constable Ernest Smith, who was 49 and married with two grown-up sons, will be buried after a service at Cappanaleck Presbyterian Church.