

JOINT DECLARATION INITIATIVE

Speaking Note

1. Though we may seek some further textual improvements, I believe the text we have before us (JD.15) is close to being the best we can expect to secure. It is on this basis that we should decide in principle whether or not to proceed.

2. The Joint Declaration will be seen abroad, and by much opinion in Great Britain, as a sensible and balanced attempt by the two Governments to clarify where they stand. But it will be critically received in Northern Ireland, at least by Unionists. In substance it is defensible, but the expectations aroused by the premature Hume/Adams demarche, and subsequent events, mean that it will be largely pre-judged. Indeed virtually any joint statement prepared with the Irish Government in secrecy, even though that secrecy has been imperfectly preserved, would be received with considerable suspicion.

3. If the Declaration is followed by a cessation of violence, no doubt Hume and Adams will claim that it built on their work. This will exacerbate worries. But if there is a permanent end to violence from the Provisionals, and the Loyalist paramilitaries respond, the atmosphere in Northern Ireland should quickly be transformed.

4. If there is no cessation of violence, the Government may be accused of having been lured to make another tilt towards the Nationalist agenda for no purpose. It may also be suggested, though wrongly, that we have been engaged in indirect negotiation with the IRA. (Adams might indeed claim as much, while making it clear that the Governments have not gone far enough for the "armed struggle" to end.)

5. Nonetheless, despite the obvious risks, I believe it is right to proceed. Doing so will put considerable pressure on the Provisionals. They have had some success in presenting themselves as willing to pursue a "peace process". But if the two Governments stand firm on this Declaration, to which we may also co-opt John Hume, it will be clear that they have reached the end of the line, and that their pretensions to serious interest in bringing the violence to an end are bogus.

6. The two Governments will be seen, I believe, to have taken some risks, and to have used imagination, while remaining faithful to their principles and stated policies.

7. On the other hand if a statement is not made, the Provisional Movement will cling to hopes, which Hume/Adams, and the Irish Government's own pre-occupation with "peace", have excited of securing a further political advance.

8. I believe we need to make the Declaration and then invite the Irish Government and the constitutional parties to concentrate their attention once more on the process of political dialogue.