

1. Is this Joint Declaration the result of bargaining with the Provisionals?

No. This is a Joint Declaration by the two Governments. The two Governments take sole responsibility for everything in the text.

It is now for the Provisionals to end their violence. If they do not, the people of Northern Ireland, these islands, and throughout the world, will know what conclusion to draw as to whether Mr Adams has been serious about wanting peace.

2. But haven't the Provisionals been shown the draft in advance?

The British Government has not shown the draft to the Provisionals. It has not exchanged messages with them about it. It has had no negotiations of any sort with the Provisionals, whether over this draft or anything else. [The Irish Government ...]

3. Isn't this Joint Declaration the outcome of the Hume/Adams dialogue?

The Prime Minister and the Taoiseach made clear their attitude towards the Hume/Adams dialogue at Brussels on 29 October. They acknowledged Mr Hume's courageous and imaginative efforts. But they also agreed that any initiative could be taken only by the two Governments, and that there could be no question of their adopting or endorsing the report of the dialogue which was given to the Taoiseach, and which he has not passed on to the British Government.

4. But hasn't Mr Hume had a hand in the drafting?

The two Governments take sole responsibility for the drafting of

the Joint Declaration. It reflects discussions between them at and following the meeting in Dublin on 3 December.

5. Is this the end of the peace process?

It is now for the Provisionals to show whether they are to be believed when they say they want peace. All the British Government's policies, including security and socio-economic policies, are framed and implemented with the need in mind to bring terrorism to an end. While terrorism continues, that objective will be pursued with undiminished vigour. If violence is genuinely brought to an end, the whole range of policies directed against it would inevitably fall to be reviewed in the light of the changed circumstances.

6. Do you expect peace?

The Provisionals have said repeatedly that they are interested in securing an end to violence. It is now for them, and the Loyalist paramilitaries, to end their violence once and for all.

7. What happens if there is peace?

A genuine end to violence would transform life throughout Northern Ireland, and throughout the island of Ireland. People would at last attain the peace for which they have yearned for so long. In the resulting climate, a lasting overall settlement addressing all the relevant relationships could be pursued free from the efforts of the terrorists to undermine it.

8. Have the Unionists been consulted?

The drafting is the sole responsibility of the two Governments. Both Governments have repeatedly made clear that any lasting settlement must be acceptable to both sides of the community, and

the Joint Declaration takes full account of the interests and concerns of both sides of the community in Northern Ireland.

The Prime Minister and his colleagues have had a number of meetings with Unionist politicians recently, and have taken full account of their views in agreeing the Joint Statement with the Irish Government.

9. How do you expect the Unionists to react?

In discussing the Joint Declaration with the Irish Government, the British Government has taken full account of Unionist views, including those expressed to the Prime Minister at recent meetings. It is also evident from the text that the Taoiseach has sought to address the concerns of Unionists in Northern Ireland. The Joint Declaration seeks to safeguard the interests of both sides of the community in Northern Ireland. There is no sellout, no betrayal, no rewarding of terrorism. Unionists have nothing to fear from this Joint Declaration.

10. The Declaration is unbalanced?

The Declaration addresses the interests and concerns of both sides of the community.

For instance, it reiterates the statutory constitutional guarantee that Northern Ireland will not cease to be part of the United Kingdom while that is the wish of a majority of its people. And it makes clear that the British Government's concern is to uphold the democratic wishes of the [greater number of the] people of Northern Ireland. For his part, the Taoiseach makes clear that it would be wrong to attempt to impose a united Ireland, in the absence of the freely given consent of the majority of the people of Northern Ireland.

Equally, the Declaration acknowledges that it is for the people of the island of Ireland alone, by agreement between the two parts respectively, to exercise their self-determination on the basis of consent, freely and concurrently given, North and South, to bring about a united Ireland, if that is their wish. The British Government reaffirms that it would legislate to give effect to this wish, if that is what the people of both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland should come to want.

11. Hasn't the British Government joined the ranks of the persuaders/ accepted the value of a united Ireland?

No. In paragraph 7, both Governments accept that Irish unity would be achieved only by those who favour this outcome persuading those who do not, peacefully and without coercion or violence. That does not in any way imply that the British Government is itself among the persuaders. The document makes clear that the concern of the British Government is to uphold the democratic wishes of the people of Northern Ireland. Equally, while the British Government has no quarrel with the aspiration to a united Ireland, it will not assert the value of that against the wishes of a majority in Northern Ireland.

12. What implication does the Declaration have for Articles 2 and 3?

The Declaration includes the Taoiseach's confirmation that, in the event of an overall settlement, the Irish Government will, as part of a balanced constitutional accommodation, put forward and support proposals for change in the Irish Constitution which would fully reflect the principle of consent in Northern Ireland.

13. If the Irish Government accepts the consent principle, why does it not reform Articles 2 and 3 now?

The Taoiseach has expressed his view that he does not believe that constitutional change would command sufficient support among the Irish people in advance of an overall accommodation acceptable to all concerned.

14. Has this Declaration superseded the Talks process?

Not at all. The Prime Minister and the Taoiseach renewed on 29 October their support for the objectives of the Talks process. They said then that they regard that process as vital and its objectives as valid and achievable. The Declaration is entirely consistent with this, and acknowledges the need for political dialogue involving the two Governments and the Northern Ireland constitutional parties.

15. Surely the Talks process is now finished, and the Ancram Round dead, whether or not there is peace?

There is nothing in the Joint Declaration which is incompatible with the Talks process. The need to achieve a lasting political settlement addressing all the key relationships remains.

Michael Ancram's round of meetings with the Northern Ireland parties has made an invaluable contribution to bringing about conditions in which such an accommodation can be pursued by the two Governments and the Northern Ireland main constitutional political parties.

The Joint Declaration provides no ground for backing away from the Talks process: instead, it reinforces the need for it.

The British Government has already made clear its readiness, if necessary, to bring forward its own assessment of the elements of an overall settlement most likely to command agreement, and the most fruitful areas for further discussion and negotiation. It will do so if that is necessary in order to make progress. The British Government does not have a blueprint, and does not seek to pre-empt any of the other Talks participants from similarly producing their own assessments.

16. Does the Declaration mean that Sinn Fein can now join the Talks process?

No. Before anything can happen, the IRA must end the violence and show that they have genuinely done so. The Declaration makes clear that the British Government would be prepared to enter preliminary exploratory dialogue with Sinn Fein within three months after a permanent cessation of IRA violence had been announced and established; and that the Irish Government would also make arrangements which would permit Sinn Fein to enter into political dialogue. That does not mean that from that moment Sinn Fein would be eligible to come to the Talks table: the Joint Declaration contains no commitment on that point, which would be for consideration by all concerned after the ending of violence had been sufficiently demonstrated.

17. Does the Declaration imply a commitment to a united Ireland within the "next generation"?

No. There are no timescales in the Declaration. That would be inconsistent with the principle that it is for the people of the island of Ireland, North and South, respectively to determine and agree on questions of constitutional status.

18. Does the Declaration imply joint authority?

The Joint Declaration says that it is for the people of the island of Ireland to reach agreement on future relationships in Ireland. The Declaration entails no derogation from either UK or Irish sovereignty.

19. Doesn't the right of Irish self-determination take priority over Northern Ireland consent?

No. Paragraph 5 makes clear the Taoiseach's acceptance that the democratic right of self-determination by the people of Ireland as a whole must be achieved and exercised with and subject to the agreement and consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland.

20. Won't the Declaration provoke a loyalist backlash?

There would be no justification whatsoever for that. The Declaration fully safeguards the interests of both sides of the community in Northern Ireland. There can never be any justification for terrorist violence.

21. Why is the Declaration silent on the idea of an Irish Convention/Forum?

The final paragraph sets out the positions of the two Governments on the role Sinn Fein could play once a renunciation of violence had been made and sufficiently demonstrated. It indicates that the Irish Government will make their own arrangements which would permit Sinn Fein to enter into political dialogue.

22. Isn't the Declaration a reward for terrorism?

The Joint Declaration does not reward terrorism. It is not the

result of a bargain with the terrorists, and is fully consistent with the principles of the two Governments. It seeks to address constitutional principles and political realities in a way which recognises the validity, addresses the concerns, and safeguards the interests, of both main traditions.

Briefing: speak in advance to:

- Minister
- Minister
- Alderman
- Archbishop
- Cardinal

WTO Ministers
and PPS's - My first thing Wednesday?

Briefing of opinion formers:

- Letter to key opinion formers
- priority for phone calls
- list for SPS
- M Anoran
- sackbatters: NI Cons Party?

Media:

- Division of responsibilities between PM, SPS, M Anoran
- Talk to local editors (M Anoran)
- Follow-up with media over weekend