



# National Committee on American Foreign Policy

*Where Leaders Meet*

## Northern Ireland Peace Initiative

### Conference on Northern Ireland

*New York, February 1, 1994*

*Conference Director: Dr. Carol Rittner*

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### *Welcome*

**by William J. Flynn**

Welcome, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to New York, and welcome to the Waldorf-Astoria. My name is Bill Flynn. I have the honor and privilege of serving as the chairman of the National Committee on American Foreign Policy. I am delighted that so many of you came to this very important meeting. What triggered this meeting was the joint declaration entered into by the Irish and the British governments. Some see this as a historic breakthrough for peace in the north of Ireland. Most Americans, I think, will favor that development if this statement proves to be correct. Some, of course, will question it, and some will oppose it.

Several months ago I was invited to join a delegation to go to the north of Ireland. Despite my belief that altogether too many delegations have visited the north of Ireland to no avail, I went, and the trip turned out to be a very important week in my life. We were received by no less than twenty individuals or groups ranging from the president of Ireland to the prime minister of Ireland to Sir Patrick Mayhew of the United Kingdom to leaders of all political parties except one—the Reverend Paisley's group. By the way, our delegation consisted of Bruce Morrison, a former congressman from Connecticut, Neil O'Dowd, a businessman, Chuck Feeney, and me. What we found was worse than what some of us, particularly me, had expected. From the Falls Road to the Shankill Road and from one end of Ireland to the other, we found deprivation, discouragement, fear, and mistrust. We came away distressed but with the determination to act in a positive way if we found some way to do so.



As the first American of Irish heritage to chair this distinguished National Committee on American Foreign Policy, I can do no less than raise the question of peace in the north of Ireland because this organization has a long history of involving itself in matters of great concern to American foreign policy from one end of the world to the other, and I am very impressed by that, and I hope that those of you who take the trouble to research this organization will be equally impressed. And so we put the north of Ireland on our agenda, and when the joint declaration was issued and was hailed by so many, including Cardinal Daly, the cardinal archbishop and primate of all Ireland, who called it a model of balance and fairness, we began the job of putting together a meeting to find out what the people of Northern Ireland think because no matter what we Americans think, we need to know what the people affected think, and so we decided to ask them to speak through their elected leaders. To that end, we invited the five political leaders of the north of Ireland to speak to us, emphasizing the fact that the National Committee on American Foreign Policy has no political agenda whatever. It is dedicated to educating itself and to advising those who will listen.

Two leaders of political parties, Mr. James Molyneux and the Reverend Ian Paisley, would not come because one other political leader had agreed to come. We are extremely disappointed even though we may have another conference and invite only those two leaders to come and express their points of view. Nevertheless, we believe that until all five political leaders come together—indeed, all the people come together—there will be no peace in Northern Ireland. And so we have embarked on an adventure in peace with those leaders who grace us with their presence today. There are three. We will start with Dr. John Alderdice, followed by Mr. John Hume and Mr. Gerry Adams. Then there will be a press conference and a reception.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am very proud to present to you Dr. George Schwab, a Columbia University Ph. D., a professor at the City University of New York, a noted author, and the very distinguished president of this fine organization. Ladies and gentlemen, Dr. Schwab.

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***The National Committee and the  
Conference on Northern Ireland***

**by Dr. George D. Schwab**

Thank you, Mr. Flynn. The idea of a conference on the north of Ireland is not new with the National Committee. The National Committee on American Foreign Policy began to entertain such an idea way back in 1988, and toward that end I invited Miss Edwina McMahon, who, I think is in this audience today, to write about the conflict for the *American Foreign Policy Newsletter*, which she did for the August 1988 issue. It caused a tremendous stir here, in the north of Ireland, and also at Downing Street. Well, it took us more than five years to finalize the plan, and, as our chairman mentioned, it was the joint declaration that moved us to act rapidly, and that is why we are here today.

Let me say a few words about the National Committee on American Foreign Policy. As the president of the organization, I would like to note that I cofounded it with the late Hans Morgenthau roughly twenty years ago. It is an organization that is interested in educating the public on critical foreign policy problems facing the United States. In addition, we articulate what our national interests are and make them widely known mainly through our publications. As is well known, the name Hans Morgenthau is synonymous with political realism in international relations, and we in the National Committee articulate the country's interests within this conceptual framework. And it is our willingness to take a public stand independent of partisan, ethnic, or regional interests that makes the



National Committee, a voluntary nonprofit and nonpartisan organization, different from other organizations.

The question of the north of Ireland is of great interest to the United States not only because of the human factor involved in the tragedy and the human rights factor that must be reflected in any settlement but because it also touches on our security interests. Britain is, after all, a staunch friend and ally of the United States. As such we are concerned about the implications of the resources that Britain commits to the north of Ireland year after year and the effects of paramilitary violence on Britain. For how long can these conflicts remain manageable? For how long will Britain be able to endure the conflict without compromising its commitments elsewhere? I hope that some of these concerns will be addressed in the course of the day.

It is my pleasure now to introduce to you the moderator of this historic conference, Ambassador Angier Biddle Duke. Ambassador Duke, a former president of the National Committee on American Foreign Policy, is now a member of the Committee's Board of Trustees and the president of the Council of Ambassadors. Ambassador Duke has compiled a long and distinguished record of public service. He was ambassador to El Salvador, Denmark, Spain, and Morocco and was the chief of protocol at the State Department and the White House. For his exemplary service, the National Committee on American Foreign Policy honored him in 1981 with the Hans J. Morgenthau award, the most prestigious in foreign policy. Ambassador Duke.

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### *The Ground Rules of the Conference*

**by Ambassador Angier Biddle Duke**

Thank you very much, George Schwab. I salute you, our chairman, Bill Flynn, and everyone else in this room. We have all come together in a common purpose, and it is obvious to everyone in this room that we are meeting today at a historic moment. I am conscious of this setting for it was here just a few years ago that Margaret Thatcher received the Morgenthau award from the National Committee on American Foreign Policy. It is not much more than a month after the joint declaration for peace was issued by the prime ministers of Ireland and Britain, and since that brief period of time, Bill Flynn moved ahead to bring all the parties together to deliberate. Chairman Flynn persisted and prevailed in his efforts to advance the peace process here and now. Forty-four million Irish Americans must be profoundly moved by this evidence of what he has accomplished so far. Because of his initiative in organizing this forum, forty American senators and congressmen prevailed on President Clinton to make it possible just this past weekend for us to welcome here the representatives of all parties in Ireland, and we salute President Clinton for his positive and decisive action that reflects a transformation of American policy from aloofness, from detachment, to engagement. Whatever else transpires, it certainly will warm the relationship between the White House and the Irish-American community.

Let me emphasize our endorsement of the joint declaration. It does indeed reflect the yearning for peace that is shared by all traditions in Ireland and has created a historic opportunity to end the tragic crisis of bloodshed.

I hope that of this special conference it may one day be said, to paraphrase Isaiah on people living in a land of deep shadow: May the light of this conference today illuminate future talks and the future of the peace process. May it encourage the participants who are meeting outside their homeland in this neutral and friendly setting. We are determined to be nonjudgmental. We are determined to be



objective and firmly and amiably impartial. We will give every man his due. We will give every man his say within the essential structure of time limitations.

Now let me go over some of the ground rules for our meeting. Each participant will be allocated thirty minutes for his presentation and equal time for his dialogue with members of the audience. I will notify the speaker when five minutes remain to close his remarks, and at the conclusion of that time, I will reserve the right to cut off the microphone. Questions and statements from the floor will be limited, and after a warning they too will be subject to electronic termination. Let's all bear in mind that we have not come together to engage in confrontational or competitive debate. We have embarked on a process of healing. The aim of this conference is to encourage constructive dialogue directed at ending the violence. The conference is to be recorded, and we ask any of you speaking from the floor to give us your name. You are part of history. The mikes are connected with the press, and we want to know who you are and to pay attention to what you have to say.

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*Dr. John T. Alderdice*

**Leader of the Alliance Party**

Thank you very much, Ambassador, for your warm welcome. I also thank Mr. Flynn and Professor Schwab and all those who have taken the trouble to make this conference available to us.

Let me say a little bit about my personal position and the experience that brings me here. Despite the increasing number of gray hairs in my beard, I am a relatively young man who is married and has a family. I grew up in Northern Ireland, coming to my teenage years in the later part of the 1960s when the violence began to break out. I come from a Protestant background and my concern at that stage was what it was about the people in Northern Ireland and their situation that led us to be so destructive of one another and our own interests. We live in a beautiful part of the world. We have culture, artistic flair, and ability. We enjoy good relations with people in many parts of the world, and virtually everyone who comes to the island of Ireland remarks on the hospitality of the Irish people. So it was a puzzle to me why we were so destructive of ourselves and our beautiful country. When I set out to try to make my own small contribution, it was with a conviction that we had to find a way of understanding our difficulties and a way of accommodating them so that there could be peace not only for us and our children to enjoy but also in order to play our proper role in Europe, and perhaps even farther afield. It became clear to me that to take a simple partisan approach and follow the line of so many of my coreligionists into a Unionist party that had no place for Catholics and that had a tradition that was often oppressive of those with whom one disagreed was no future at all for me.

I wrote to all the constitutional political parties at the end of my time at the university and asked them to send me details of their programs so that I could see where my own convictions about accommodation, about reconciliation, about tolerance and plurality would best fit in the political spectrum. I found it within the Alliance party, a group of people who came together in 1970 to form a political party of Protestants and Catholics from unionist and nationalist backgrounds to work together for peace in Northern Ireland. They were not very well regarded. Unionists saw them as traitors; covert republicans. Many nationalists saw them simply as unionists who were trying to put a good face on an oppressive history. That is often the lot of those who try to stand in the middle. You get run down by traffic from both sides of the road. But it still seemed to me that by building relationships, establishing channels of communication, and trying to clarify a political program informed by liberal, pluralist, and democratic notions similar to those of other people throughout the



world, I, as a Protestant, could make a contribution by working with Catholics and by enabling both sides to find a way of living together.

When I came to the leadership of the Alliance party in 1987, almost all channels of communication between the political parties had broken down. The Unionist parties would not speak to anyone else, including even the British government. It was through the efforts of many people that eventually, in 1991, the constitutional party leaders and representatives of the two governments were able to agree on a statement that established ground rules for political talks toward a resolution of the problems in Northern Ireland, between north and south, and between Britain and Ireland. Those talks began with a great deal of optimism, perhaps similar to the level of optimism that there is at the moment about the future and the possibilities for peace. I confess that despite being regarded as one who should be speaking all the time of hope, I expressed a good deal of caution at that stage not because I didn't want to see peace break out, not because I didn't want to see accommodation, but because I understood the depth of the division in the community and I felt that it was going to take quite some time to overcome the hurdles of suspicion and distrust and the desire that still remained on both sides to achieve a victory over the other side. Indeed it turned out that way. When we moved into talks in 1992, although we were able to understand something more of where each of the parties stood, a great gulf remained between the parties. One of the great concerns that any democrat must have is that when democratic policies fail to deliver, there is a great temptation for young people, and indeed some who have been around a little bit longer, to lose faith in democratic politics entirely, to turn away from it, to see no hope for it, and, in the case of some, to see violence as the only way of bringing a resolution. There have been those on the nationalist side of the community and those on the unionist side of the community who have felt for a long time that politics is not the way forward, and there have been bombings and killings and horrible sectarian murders on both sides. Tragically they continue. When you look at the reasons for all of this, you will find as many different notions and theories as there are people on the island of Ireland, and if you go around to the pubs on a Saturday night, you will find many "solutions," and the more people have had to drink, the more certain they are about their "solutions." But the truth is that the people in the northeast of the island have always been a little bit different from the people in the rest of the island not for racial reasons but because their relationship with the other island, particularly with Scotland, has been a very close and long one. I was telling some folks last night a story about a lady who was watching the last of the British soldiers going onto the boats in Dublin in the early 1920s. She said, "Thank God to see them boys go and now we have peace to fight among ourselves." The antipathy and the violence between the people in the Northeast and the rest of the island have lasted for a very long time indeed.

There are those who say we are different racially and ethnically; there are those who see a deep division within Northern Ireland that can never be healed. Yet it has always seemed to me that we in Northern Ireland are more of a community than we are anything else. People in the north of Ireland have stronger relationships with one another than they have with the people of the south or with the people of England. Just look at their names. It is fascinating to note the prominence of one of the oldest family names. We've got Ken Maginnis in the Unionist party. (Sadly he's not here with us.) We've got Martin McGuinness of Sinn Fein. We've got Alban McGuinness of the SDLP. We've got Danny McGuinness in the Alliance party. Or look at the first names of party leaders: There are John and Seamus who lead the Social Democratic and Labour party. In the Alliance party, we're led by John and Seamus. In the Unionist party, we've got Ian and James, and as you all know, Ian is the Scottish form of John, and James is the English form of Seamus. Despite what we have in common, a family feud is often the most bitter and long standing. It was said by the chairman that my background is in psychiatry, and one of the things that I have noted when families are in disarray is that often the condition is an expression of a rift between the parents and that if the mother and the father can't agree with each other, the children have difficulties in their lives, in their self-esteem, and in their behavior. When I look at Northern Ireland and I see a history between Britain and Ireland of poor relationships, it seems to me that this is one area where we must start.



So it was with great satisfaction that I saw Prime Minister John Major of Britain and Prime Minister Albert Reynolds of Ireland begin to work together to establish a set of principles, a set of ground rules, an understanding of the situation in Northern Ireland that would form a solid base for all of us to move forward. And when they published the joint declaration in Downing Street not long ago and when I read it, I was deeply encouraged. It's a very sophisticated and thoughtful document. It seems to me that it establishes a number of principles that we would do well to heed. The first of those is that violence is not only no solution to a problem but it also makes the problem worse. What we must do is find a way to persuade the paramilitary representatives of both sides to stop the violence.

The second thing that is important to remember is that the people of Northern Ireland must determine their own future. It is not for London to decide what should happen in Northern Ireland. If the people of Northern Ireland want to remain in the United Kingdom, they should have that right. If they want to be part of a united Ireland, they should have that right. Prime Minister Reynolds also made clear that from his point of view, the people of Northern Ireland had to decide their future. He has made it very clear that the people of the Irish Republic do not want to impose anything on their brothers and sisters in Northern Ireland. They do not want to see the people of Britain being used to persuade, cajole, or coerce the Northern Irish to acquiesce to a future that they do not want to experience.

And the fact that the prime ministers of Britain and the Republic of Ireland have announced their willingness to work together to facilitate a discussion among the people of Northern Ireland about how they will live together in harmony is very mature, very progressive, very encouraging, and a profoundly significant development.

The third thing that I think very important is their indication that though they want everyone to be involved, no one should have a veto. There's been a lot of talk about developments in the Middle East and in South Africa and how they bring a sense of hope to us in Ireland, and I think that's true. But there are many differences. Nevertheless, there is one analogy that I would like to draw to your attention. It is the courage of Mr. Rabin and Mr. Arafat. They did not achieve agreement by insisting that even the most extreme and the most violent should have to give their consent to the agreement because that would not be living in the world of real politics. Mr. Rabin had to turn his back on the Jewish fundamentalists who have rallied against what he's done. Mr. Arafat had to accept the resignations of some senior members of the PLO executive in order to enable the majority of moderate people on both sides to reach across the divide to one another and establish a bridgehead, a bulwark, a solid bloc of cooperation across the traditional divide. I would like to believe that it will be possible for all the parties that were invited to this conference to cooperate and end violence and to find a political way forward together.

But I have to say to you that the message so far is that this may not be an entirely realistic objective. There are three party leaders here, Mr. Hume, Mr. Adams, and me. Together we represent less than half the people in Northern Ireland. I would like to have seen the representatives of the Ulster Unionist and the Democratic Unionist parties here, but they are not here because of their political views and because of the views of their own people.

And so when I come to the final question: What the United States and people here (people who are concerned, as you are) can do to help the people of Northern Ireland, I would say three things: First, remember that the situation is complex. A colleague of mine was in Hong Kong two or three years ago when the issue of the boat people was prominent. I was on the telephone with him, and I said, "Well, Gordon, how is it?" And he said, "It's just like Northern Ireland, John. It's perfectly simple from 3,000 miles away." The truth about the conflict in Northern Ireland is that it's complex and difficult. And many of the significant people are not here to present their views to you. Unless their views are appreciated and recognized, there will be no way forward.



The second thing that I would appeal to you is to give full support to the initiative of Mr. Reynolds and of Mr. Major. In my view, they have established a solid basis for political progress, irrespective of the responses that individual parties may give to it. And I hope that you will find a way of backing them completely in what they are doing.

The third thing is this: Please be concerned about *all* the people of Northern Ireland. A couple of years ago, when I was trying to persuade both the British and the Irish governments to change their views a little and move forward together, I said to the British government, "Please do not back the unionists. Please try to take into account the sensitivities and the desires of all the people of Northern Ireland." And I said to the Irish government, "Please do not back the nationalists. Please take into consideration the sensitivities and the aspirations of all the people of Northern Ireland." If the British government were to back the unionists and the Irish government were to back the nationalists, then they would deepen the partisan split in the community. I believe the two governments are sincere in their resolve to work together.

Also, I believe that Mr. Reynolds and Mr. Major are becoming increasingly sensitive to the needs of all the people of Northern Ireland, and I would appeal to you too to take the same approach. You will not find it easy because though there are some of us who are prepared to come and give our views (the three parties that are represented here and we disagree deeply about many things), others who represent even more people in Northern Ireland are not prepared to come here. Yet if you ignore their views, some of them will turn increasingly toward violence and not away from it. Peace will not be achieved by accommodating the needs and desires of one side of the community. It can result only from accommodating both sides. That is the critical message that you must understand.

I said earlier that I come from a Protestant background. Worse, still, I come from a Presbyterian background, and if that were not the final nail in my coffin, I am inclined toward some of the Presbyterian predilections but will not succumb to the temptation to keep you here listening to my point one, two, three, finally, and at the end. In other words, I won't give you cause to do what the members of my father's church at home did: They hung a calendar over the clock because they thought it was more appropriate to the length of his dissertations. Out of due deference to your forbearance and out of a certain trepidation about what is meant by the chairman's warning about electronic termination for anybody who goes on too long, I will leave things at this point. I think it will be more useful for us to engage in a dialogue consisting of your questions and my responses rather than for you to listen to me speak any longer.

Thank you very much.

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*John Hume*

**Leader of the Social Democratic and Labour Party**

Mr. Chairman, thank you for having me here today. I thank the Committee for organizing this occasion. The event in itself underlines that at last the problems of our part of the world are at the top of the international agenda, just as it was clear that when the joint declaration was made between Prime Minister John Major and Prime Minister Albert Reynolds, our problems were at the top of their agenda as well. As I've often said, if what is happening on our streets were happening on the streets of Britain, the British parliament would be packed every day until the problem was solved, but on a Friday, when Northern Ireland is discussed, one can take a long weekend, and only a handful shows up.



In the past twenty years until December 1993, 3,106 people lost their lives in Northern Ireland. That's the equivalent of half a million people in the United States. That's the equivalent of 28,000 people in the greater New York area. That's how serious our problem is. Of those who died, 1,765 were ordinary civilians who were going about their business when they were killed; 293 were members of the political force; 201 were members of the Ulster Defense Regiment; 442 were British soldiers (working-class people); 252 members of the Provisional IRA lost their lives; 96 loyalist paramilitaries lost their lives; 38 members of INLA, a small republican movement, and 26 members of the official IRA lost their lives. That's exactly the breakdown of those who died.

All of those people who lost their lives were human beings. All of their families suffered the same sense of loss and grief. All are victims of our history and our failure to solve our problems and that means that the greatest and most important challenge that faces our people today is to end this violence and to remove the gun and the bomb forever from our island people.

It's not just those horrifying statistics that underline the challenges that we face in the north of Ireland because in the city of Belfast, which has the highest churchgoing population of any city in western Europe, it has been necessary to build not one wall but thirteen walls to separate and protect one section of a Christian people from another. Those walls are indictments of all of us because our attitudes have built all of them. But by being indictments, they also pose challenges to all of us (and I also speak to people in this room who have fixed notions about Ireland) because if our attitudes have brought us where we are, then surely every one of us has a duty to reexamine our attitudes in depth so that we can bring those walls down and bring lasting peace and agreement to our people.

There's a major challenge to the unionist mindset and to the nationalist mindset, and if you study conflict in the world, as I have done, to look for ways and means of resolving it, you will find that there are similar mindsets everywhere there is conflict. Take the unionist mindset in the north of Ireland. The honorable objective of the unionists, primarily the Protestant population, is to protect their heritage and their difference, and their heritage and their difference go back a long way. It is a proud heritage that has given twelve presidents to this country. I have no objection to that objective of protecting their heritage because difference is the essence of humanity. No two human beings in the entire human race are the same. Diversity is the essence of humanity, and therefore the preservation of diversity is part of the enrichment of humanity. My quarrel is not with their objective but with their methods, and their methods reflect a mindset that is prevalent in different parts of the world where there is conflict. It's an Africaner style of mindset that asserts that the only way to protect ourselves is to hold all power in our own hands and exclude everyone else. That's why we've had so much discrimination in the north of Ireland during the past seventy years. That attitude reveals a deep lack of self-confidence in their own identity because if they had confidence in their identity, in who and what they are, it wouldn't matter whom they lived beside, and if some people adopt a policy of excluding other people because of differences with them, that will lead to conflict. So the challenge to the unionists is to recognize the strength of their heritage, to stand on their own two feet, and to negotiate an agreement with the people with whom they share a piece of Earth—an agreement that respects diversity and then allows us to work together to build our land.

Then there is the nationalist mindset in the north of Ireland as well. They need to examine themselves too. In many ways that mindset is expressed quite simplistically, and I find it, to be honest with you, among some Irish Americans: "This is our land and since you are a minority, you unionists have no right to stop us from uniting with the rest of Ireland." That's what I call a territorial mindset, and you usually get that too where there is conflict. People (not territory) have rights. Without people that little island would be only a jungle. Without people Earth would be only a jungle. It's the people of Ireland (not the territory) that are divided. Partition didn't cause the Irish problem; partition institutionalized the Irish problem. The differences between our people go back well beyond partition. If Wolfe Tone wanted to unite Catholic and Protestant dissenters in 1798, they



must have been divided. What partition did unfortunately was to institutionalize that division and make it deeper and worse, and indeed the physical expression of nationalism in the form of violence also deepens that division. If you analyze the problem, as I have, as a division among our people, then physical force deepens that division, intensifies the bitterness, and makes the problem worse, and you get tit-for-tat killings, which are happening tragically all the time. As Martin Luther King, Jr., so powerfully put it, the doctrine of an eye for an eye leaves everybody blind.

It's easy to dismiss attitudes and to criticize attitudes as I've just been doing. The challenge is what do we do about the future. As you know, we have a great respect for our past in Ireland, and it's very easy to be elected in Northern Ireland by talking about the past and pointing at the other side and blaming them. Negative politics is easy. But we should recognize that our respect for the past has created the present, which isn't very pleasant, and is paralyzing our attitudes to the future.

What about the future? I have to admit that I have been very encouraged and inspired by my experience in Europe, and as a historian, I have learned a lot from what has happened in the European Community where the greatest lesson in conflict resolution in the history of the world can be learned. Cast your mind back fifty years when thirty-five million people lay dead across the continent of Europe as a result of the second war fought in thirty years. Suppose that someone had stood up then and said, "Don't worry; in fifty years we will have a unified Europe; Germans will still be Germans, and French will still be French." That person would have been taken off to see Dr. John Alderdice or one of his colleagues. But it happened. Today I sit in the European Parliament, three miles from the German border. How did the leaders of Western Europe do it? Very simple, but all simple things also contain profundities. They recognized that difference is not a threat, that difference, which reflects an accident of birth, should never be the source of hatred or conflict. The answer to how to build institutions in Europe was to respect differences. Doing so allowed them to work together on economics, which is what all politics should be about: having bread on your table and a roof over your head. What they did was break down the barriers of distrust that divided them for centuries. Out of that evolved the new Europe, which is now united on the basis of respect for diversity. Indeed, if you think about the origins of your own country, it was created by people driven out of Europe by intolerance, quite a lot of them Presbyterians from the north of Ireland, I have often said that America should not present itself to the world as an economic force or military force. Instead, it should present itself as a moral force. Those people drew up a constitution and when you read it, you will find a message there that is the essence of conflict resolution.

If you pull a cent out of your pocket, you will read a message of deepest wisdom on your cheapest coin. *E Pluribus Unum*, "from many we are one." The essence of unity is the acceptance of diversity. Unity is not about one section defeating another. Unity is about agreement and about respecting the differences that go to the heart of any people, and when you apply that insight to Ireland, the same lesson can be learned.

Ireland's problems were European in origin. It was Ireland's links with Spain in the seventeenth century that brought England into Ireland. It was Ireland's links with France in the revolutionary period that led to the active union because Ireland was a back door to England's European enemies, and so England had a definite economic and strategic interest in being in Ireland. Since that changed, it changed the nature of the Irish problem, which was a conflict of sovereignty between Britain and Ireland. That is not so today, for Britain and Ireland share sovereignty in the new Europe with France, Italy, Germany, Spain, and other countries. The decisions taken about the land in which we live in Ireland, where agriculture is the largest industry north and south, are not taken in Dublin, Belfast, or London. They are taken in Brussels. That has changed the whole nature of sovereignty, but the legacy of division remains.



That problem cannot be solved by any form of force or coercion. It can be solved only by agreement, and it was that kind of public debate that was going on in the north of Ireland between us and Sinn Fein that eventually led to our private dialogue. In that private dialogue we discussed a number of factors, including how we could bring a cessation of violence and promote peace. I was not surprised that our talks provoked quite a lot of flak and criticism, but I stated the view that if 20,000 troops in our streets and 12,000 armed police—in the strictest security force lodged in Europe—could not bring peace or stop violence and if Mr. Adams and I could save lives by entering into direct dialogue, then it was our duty to do so.

In that dialogue, I put the points that I have just been putting to you. My questions to Mr. Adams revolved around the core question: "Could you state what are the reasons that the republican movement give for the use of physical force today?" He replied, "The British are here defending their economic and strategic interests by force, and they're preventing the Irish people from exercising their right to self-determination." My response was that that used to be true, but it is no longer true. To prove it is the challenge. The only people who can prove it, of course, are members of the British government, which brings us to a discussion of the joint declaration issued by the British and Irish governments.

That joint declaration, in my view, is one of the most comprehensive statements in seventy years on British-Irish relations because it makes clear for the first time that the two governments are committed to overcoming the legacy of violence and healing division on the island of Ireland. The British government has stated very clearly that it has no selfish economic or strategic interest in Northern Ireland and that its primary interest isn't to preserve the status quo or to impose a solution but to see peace, stability, and reconciliation established by agreement among all the people who inhabit the island, and so the British made clear that they have no selfish interests any more.

What about the question of the right to self-determination of the Irish people? In our first statement, Mr. Adams and I agreed that the Irish people have the right to determine their future. We also declared that we recognized that not all Irish people accept the same definition of self-determination. In other words, they are divided about how that right is to be exercised and therefore we were going to concentrate on that question. Now that the British government has finally said it will encourage, facilitate, and enable agreement to take place among the divided people of Ireland and will commit its resources to promoting agreement and legislate for whatever form that agreement takes—whether it's a united Ireland or anything else—it's a major challenge to all of us.

It's a challenge to the unionists who keep on running to Britain, looking for a guarantee that they will stay where they are, but they obviously do not trust the British government's guarantee because they need it repeated every month. The challenge of this declaration is a challenge to the unionist people to stand on their own feet because the only guarantee rests on their numbers and their geography. We cannot solve the problem without them, and despite the fact that their negativism of the last seventy years has in many ways dried up the creativity of their heritage, we need their heritage, which will constitute an economic contribution to the future of our island. Our guarantee to them is our affirmation that we are not interested in victories or defeat because victories and defeats in divided societies don't solve problems. What we want the unionist people to do is to stand on their own feet and then sit down with the rest of the people of the island and reach an agreement.

There's a similar challenge to the nationalist tradition and to those who believe in physical force. We have been told by both the British and the Irish governments that they are committed to promoting agreement. Based on those assurances, can we now all come to the table, sit down together—both sectors of our divided people—armed only with our convictions and our powers of persuasion and begin the task of breaking down the barriers of distrust that divide us? The Irish government has made an excellent proposal to ensure that discussions can continue. The Irish government put



forward a proposal to form a permanent forum that will contain all parties. Probably the unionists won't come, but for the first time in seventy years, the parties (north and south) that want to break down the barriers of division in Ireland would be meeting and working steadily and permanently to break down the barriers of distrust that divide our people, and if the violence stopped, the Irish border would be gone completely. The only signs of a border left in a unified Europe today are British military checkpoints on the Irish border. What are they there for? To deal with people who want to get rid of the border. It's a bit ironic. With violence stopped, the British checkpoints gone, and the army off the streets, there would be freedom of movement of people, goods, and services throughout Ireland. A business group has said that if that happens, 75,000 jobs would be created because it would be the first time that there would be internal free trade in Ireland in seventy years.

There is a real challenge to all of us. If we want to solve the problems rather than run around, waving our flags and draping them around us, we must dismiss the message on which most of us were reared, for we can't save our souls with bunting, as one of the Northern Irish Protestant poets once wrote. Once, when I was ten years old and my father was unemployed and I was the eldest of seven children and there was a nationalist meeting at the top of the street and they were telling us to unite Ireland and waving the flag and whipping up emotions, my father told me, "Don't get involved in that stuff, son." I said, "Why not, dad," and he said, "because you can't eat a flag." There's a message of wisdom there. All politics is about people and about people's basic rights and, in particular, about their right to life. The taking of life should never be a means of creating human rights and now, for the first time, that both governments are committed to promoting agreement, we should take up that challenge and come to the table armed only with our convictions and reach agreement, and once our quarrel is over and we start working together to build our nation, then, as we spill our sweat and not our blood, we will erode the prejudices of the past. The healing process will begin, and as we break down the barriers over a period of time, down the road in perhaps a generation will emerge a new Ireland whose unity will be based on a respect for diversity. That's the strategy that I will continue to propose. As we approach a new century and if we achieve agreement, I believe that as the largest group of wandering people in the world, which we are, we will have moved beyond the time when celebrating our Irishness is confined to St. Patrick's Day. We could then ask you who are part of our wandering people to harness your energies and your talents to help us with the task of building the new Ireland because if the forty-four million of you who said you were Irish in the last census spent only \$5.00 a week on Ireland, our Irish economy would go through the roof. I have counted it up: It would be ten billion dollars a year. What I believe, and this gathering is evidence of it, is that at last this problem is at the top of the international agenda. Let's make sure that the twenty-first century will be the first century in our island history in which we will not use guns or bombs, and that the hallmark of our patriotism will have changed from dying for Ireland to living for Ireland. Thank you.

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*Gerry Adams*

**President, Sinn Fein**

I would like to begin today by thanking the National Committee on American Foreign Policy for giving me this opportunity to address you on the peace initiative —on the current opportunities for peace that exist—and I wish also to acknowledge publicly and thank all those who helped to secure a visa for me to attend this conference and the many Irish Americans and supporters of free speech who have tirelessly campaigned against visa denial. I wish to extend greetings also to the many people here in the United States who have worked consistently for the cause of freedom and justice and peace in Ireland.



During the recent past there has been important movement toward a lasting peace through negotiation and dialogue in some of the world's most difficult trouble spots. The progress toward democracy and an end to apartheid in South Africa was followed by the beginnings of negotiations between the PLO and the Israeli government after decades of hostility and war. The lessons are clear: Conflict resolution requires dialogue and negotiation. The conflict in Ireland is no different, and over the past months and years, important steps have been taken in this direction. On behalf of Sinn Fein, let me reiterate once again that our party has always expressed our willingness to engage in discussions without preconditions. Our political priority is to advance the peace process based on inclusive negotiations. The development of open debate and dialogue can only assist such a process. No situation is improved by ignorance or misinformation.

This forum, by encouraging such necessary dialogue and the free exchange of information, can assist the developing peace process in Ireland. I am very pleased therefore to address you. I am sorry that only one unionist party is represented here today. Mr. Paisley and Mr. Molyneux should be here to assist and contribute to these proceedings, and so too should the British government.

We live in momentous times marked by peace efforts in the Middle East and South Africa and in Ireland. My role is to try to fill a gap of twenty years of disinformation about republican intentions, to tell you of our part in shaping the peace process, and to ask you, other representatives of public opinion in the United States, and the U.S. government to help achieve this objective.

Today we in Ireland are very aware that 44.3 million Americans claim roots in Ireland, and worldwide it is estimated that there are seventy million Irish, an incredible figure if one considers that in Ireland today we have only five million people.

Here in the United States, millions of Irish, fleeing repression, fleeing famine, found a welcome refuge, and no other group with the exception of African Americans came to these shores with fewer prospects; and no group rose to prominence so quickly. In the lifetime of Paul O'Dwyer, a very long lifetime, the Irish have gone from "No Irish Need Apply" signs to the White House, from owning bars to running boardrooms. John F. Kennedy, the grandson of famine era immigrants, rose to the highest Political Position in this nation. President Clinton too can claim Irish roots on his mother's side.

Among Irish Americans, and this has been obvious for so long, there is a continuing sadness at the ongoing tragedy in the north of Ireland. The memory of Abraham Lincoln and his extraordinary struggle to save his nation from partition has an eerie echo in Ireland where we have lived under the failed Partition of our own country since 1921. Wolfe Tone, the first political thinker to dream of an Irish republic, was heavily influenced by the reality that beyond his shores lay a great sprawling nation called America, conceived in liberty and dedicated to equality.

Sinn Fein, the party that I represent, is actively engaged in seeking an end to the sanguinary conflict and to all armed action and to bringing about a total demilitarization of the situation. Our peace strategy is the central function of Sinn Fein as a political party. At a personal level, it is my overriding priority to advance the search for peace to the point where it is at the center of the political agenda in both Ireland and Britain. U.S. help is vital to move it forward.

## **SINN FEIN'S PEACE STRATEGY**

For Sinn Fein, the search for an effective peace process began more than seven years ago, when it became clear to us that an effective political initiative was necessary to break the military and political deadlock and to move away from what was developing into a Permanent conflict. Successive British initiatives—political, economic, and military—had failed precisely because they



were just that: British initiatives that ignored the central causes of the conflict, partition and the denial by Britain of the light of the Irish people to national self-determination.

It's ironic that while the British government was engaged in propaganda against us and those that we represent, while it was censoring Sinn Fein and preventing me from entering Britain (and, through pressure, until now, from entering the United States), the British were simultaneously engaged with Sinn Fein in prolonged contact and dialogue without preconditions. And when John Hume did the right thing, he was crucified for speaking to us, but those who were publicly condemning him were also engaged in dialogue with us.

Sinn Fein entered into direct contact with the British government in a genuine attempt to advance the search for peace. During the course of almost three years of dialogue and contact, the British government proposed that a British government delegation meet with a Sinn Fein delegation for an intense round of negotiations. We were asked to seek a short suspension of IRA operations to facilitate those discussions. Given the importance of this, Sinn Fein sought and was given a commitment from the IRA leadership of Oglaiigh Na hEireann that it would suspend operations for two weeks to enhance and facilitate discussions. This was conveyed to the British government in May of last year. And if that is news to you, it is because your news about Ireland comes through London.

Although we were informed that this positive response by republicans to the British Proposal was the subject of a series of high-level meetings by British ministers, including John Major and other officials, there was no positive response by them. In fact, the British moved away from their proposal and refused to follow through on it.

And this bad faith, and it can only be bad faith, and double dealing and all that was involved have seriously and clearly presented difficulties for us, for republicans, in assessing the British government's intention in relation to the present opportunities for peace. The history of this contact clearly underlines that republicans are serious, are prepared to take risks, and are prepared to show flexibility in the search for a lasting peace.

## **THE BRITISH PRESENCE**

Let me give you a brief outline, as we see it, of the problem. First, it has to be said, even though it is a truism, that Britain's role in Ireland has never been benign. It has always acted as a dominating colonial power. Britain's presence and influence have been destructive and have prevented the Irish people from resolving our differences, and the whole notion of Britain as a peacekeeping agent in Ireland flies in the face of history and present reality. The divisions and conflict in Ireland today and the divisions among our people in the past stem from the immediate realities of the British presence. The "Northern Ireland" state or statelet was created by Britain in 1921 when Britain partitioned our country without the consent and against the wishes of the vast majority of Irish people. No Irish person, unionist or nationalist, voted or was given the opportunity to vote on the partition of our country. Since its creation this "state" has been in a state of perpetual crisis, existing only as a result of draconian legislation, repression, and injustice and in a permanent "state of emergency."

Since 1969, when the reality of life for Irish nationalists living in this sectarian state was exposed to international scrutiny, despite and since the enactment of some modest reforms, the overall situation has not improved for nationalists. This is despite sophisticated propaganda from the British government that their contribution over the last twenty years has been centered on reform and the improvement of the state. The inequalities and the injustice on which the state was founded have not been removed. It is worth noting that the British government has the worst record on human rights of any signatory of the European Convention on Human Rights. It has been brought before the



European Court on thirty-one occasions and has been found in violation of this convention twenty-one times. I say that for the record. I say that just to set the historical and current record before you. But now, however, because this has to do with the past, the British government has the opportunity to play a positive role in a definitive peace process.

## **NATIONAL SELF-DETERMINATION**

I want to deal with the question of self-determination. Self-determination is a nation's exercise of the political freedom to determine its own economic, social, and cultural development without external influence and without partial or total disruption of national unity or territorial integrity. Ireland today does not have this freedom, nor does the pretext of partition hold good against these criteria. In the words of Sean MacBride, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize:

Ireland's right to sovereignty, independence and unity is inalienable and defensible. It is for the Irish people as a whole to determine the future status of Ireland. Neither Britain nor a small minority selected by Britain has any right to partition the ancient island of Ireland, nor to determine its future as a sovereign nation.

The right of the Irish people, as a whole, to self-determination is supported by universally recognized principles of international law. Sinn Fein considers the realization of the fight of our people, all the Irish people, to national self-determination to be our primary political objective. We also consider that the denial by the British government of our right to exercise this right is a major or the major source of conflict in Ireland today.

The partition of Ireland, by the way, does not only affect the north of Ireland. It affects all of Ireland, socially and economically and in terms of our national morale and consciousness and retards our ability as a nation to shape affairs and to resolve the causes of poverty, of emigration, and unemployment as well as the more obvious causes of death and destruction—the conflict in the north. And at the time when Ireland, Irish music, Irish writing, and the competence of our people in the United States are on the rise, it is deplorable that we are hemorrhaging in our own country in a way that saps that morale.

## **THE UNIONIST VETO**

The British government's public justification for its involvement in Irish affairs is that the unionists have a veto, that is, that there can be no movement without the consent of a majority of the British-created statelet. This is a perversion of democratic principles. It is also a subterfuge. The British claim to jurisdiction in Ireland is based on the Government of Ireland Act, and as far as British constitutional law is concerned, the sovereignty of parliament is absolute. The Government of Ireland Act is an act of a British parliament. That parliament is constitutionally empowered to end its jurisdiction in Ireland if it wishes without reference to anyone else.

Today's unionists represent 20 percent of our people. They are a national minority, a significant minority, but a minority nevertheless, and to bestow the power of veto or national independence and sovereignty on a national minority is in direct contravention of the principle of national self-determination.

Accepting the veto means accepting that there can be no progress. It means accepting the failed policy of partition and division, and although the six-county state has existed for seventy years, it has not developed a democratic integrity. It had no political, democratic, or economic validity when it was created and has no such validity today. Seventy years of injustice constitute an argument for an end to partition and not for its continuance.



Seventy years later, the six-county state remains politically and economically unstable and unviable, and it isn't just we nationalists who are locked into a state to which we owe no allegiance. Unionists also are tied to a very negative laager view of themselves and of their future.

## **UNIONIST RIGHTS**

Sina Fein acknowledges, recognizes, asserts, upholds, and defends the rights of unionists. We say that those democratic rights would be greatly strengthened in a new Ireland, an independent Ireland, and a harmonious Ireland. Though it is important not to be patronizing, we accept that northern unionists and northern Protestants have fears about their civil and religious liberties, and we have consistently asserted that their liberties must be guaranteed and upheld.

We seek to be part of building a society that can reflect and uphold the diversity of all our people. Our vision is for a free Ireland, a peaceful Ireland, an Ireland based on the unity of Catholic, Protestant, and dissenter, with all citizens guaranteeing the civil and religion liberties of all other citizens. And we hold to the Proclamation of 1916, which stated:

The Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens, and declares its resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and of all its parts, cherishing all of the children of the nation equally, and oblivious of the differences, carefully fostered by an alien government, which has divided a minority from the majority in the past

So we seek a new Ireland and a new constitution with a charter of rights that would include written guarantees for all of those currently constituted as loyalists. Also, as people who have been excluded, as people who have been marginalized, as people who have been demonized, we seek to include, not to exclude, them. The Ireland that we want to see would not be worthy of our people unless it involved all of our people—Catholic, Protestant, and dissenter—unless all of us could give our allegiance to that new Ireland.

Now the unionists have found the British government out on this, especially since the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985, that when the British government has seen fit, it has chosen to ignore the wishes of the unionist population. The concept of consent is one that the British apply selectively and rarely and only when it coincides with the British government's own political interests. They say they have no selfish economic or strategic interest in being in Ireland. They have not said that they have no political interest in being in Ireland. They haven't said that yet.

## **THE "CONSENT" ARGUMENT**

The argument from Britain that the consent of the unionist population is a precondition for any political movement is entirely bogus and without a democratic basis. The late Catholic Primate of All-Ireland, Cardinal O'Fiaich, speaking in 1985, four days after the Anglo-Irish Agreement was signed, commented that

The present policy of the British government—that there will be no change in the status of Northern Ireland while the majority want British rule to remain—is no policy at all. It means you do nothing and means that the loyalists in the north are given no encouragement to make a move of any kind.

And, of course, the theory of consent has never been extended to nationalists. We who live in the north are ignored. No one seeks to think why we have been forcibly coerced to live in a state in which we see no future for us or for our children. Where is the principle of democratic consent for northern nationalists?



## **BRITISH RESPONSIBILITY**

The exercise of the right to Irish national self-determination requires a change in British policy and the removal of the veto. And within the context of such a policy change Sinn Fein believes that agreement between the people of the nationalist and unionist traditions can become, for the first time, an achievable objective. We believe that the consent of all the relevant parties can be obtained if the London and Dublin governments demonstrate the political will to achieve it. And we believe that both governments should accept Irish national self-determination as a policy objective and agree on a time frame and process of consultation to bring this about.

## **THE IRISH PEACE INITIATIVE**

We have attempted to create a political debate around the core issues and in doing so to develop a peace process that would address the central causes of conflict in Ireland. To take you briefly through the history of this, our discussion document "A Scenario for Peace" in 1987 marked the public launch of this peace strategy, which resulted from an intensive analysis and review of the conflict and overall political situation in Ireland. It is clear from the analysis that the resolution of the conflict is dependent on the removal of the fundamental causes of that conflict and that peace can result only from a negotiated settlement that deals politically and effectively with the key issues. As long ago as 1988, in "Pathway to Peace" and in private dialogue, I dealt with those elements.

And while the British temporized and the talks were going nowhere, republicans argued that the British approach was fundamentally flawed and that the resolution of the national question and securing the rights of the Irish people to national self-determination were the most urgent issues facing all of us. We stated unequivocally that lasting peace could be achieved only by the creation of a national democracy, a functioning democracy, an inclusive democracy that would accommodate the diversity of the Irish people.

The document "Towards a Lasting Peace" was adopted at our 1992 Ard Fheis and defined the development of Sinn Fein's policy and the means by which the conflict could be resolved. We acknowledged and acknowledge today that the "heartfelt aspiration of most people in Ireland is for Peace. ...A peace process if it is to be both meaningful and enduring must address the root causes of conflict." And as we increasingly addressed this area of political activity, this peace strategy became our central function as a political party.

My talks with John Hume, the SDLP leader, proved to be another and, as it transpired, constituted the most significant element in this initiative. In our joint statement of 10 April 1993, we outlined our attitudes on the key issue and on all the other related issues, and I read this to you today.

We accept that the Irish people as a whole have a right to national self-determination. This is a view shared by a majority of the people of this island though not by all its people.

The exercise of self-determination is a matter for agreement between the people of Ireland. It is the search for that agreement and the means of achieving it on which we will be concentrating.

We are mindful that not all of the people of Ireland share that view or agree on how to give meaningful expression to it. Indeed we do not disguise the different views held by our own parties.

As leaders of our respective parties, we have told ourselves that we see the task of reaching agreement on a peaceful and democratic accord for all on this island as our primary challenge.



We both recognize that such a new agreement is only achievable and viable if it can earn and enjoy the allegiance of the different traditions on this island by accommodating diversity and providing for national reconciliation.

In September 1993 we actually reached agreement on a set of proposals that, we believe, could form the basis of a viable peace process if they were adopted by the London and Dublin governments. Both governments were fully informed of these matters at every stage of their development.

The proposals that we agreed to were based on a number of basic principles:

- that the Irish people as a whole have the right to national self-determination;
- that an internal settlement is not a solution;
- that the unionists cannot have a veto over British policy;
- that the consent and allegiance of unionists, expressed through an accommodation with the rest of the Irish people, are essential ingredients of a lasting peace;
- that the British government must join the persuaders;
- that the London and Dublin governments have the major responsibility to secure political progress;
- It was agreed that a process to realize these principles would contain the political dynamic that could create the conditions for a lasting peace and a total demilitarization of the situation.

## **THE DOWNING STREET DECLARATION**

The Downing Street declaration is a response to all of that. Consequently, republicans have a duty to make fundamental reassessments in the wake of this declaration. Does this declaration represent a first step by the British government in the direction of a lasting peace in Ireland? Or is it merely a political response by that government, under pressure from the Irish peace initiative, aimed at avoiding a political confrontation with Dublin and at fragmenting nationalist consensus on the island of Ireland and bringing political pressure to bear on Sinn Fein in order to damage us? Which is it?

And even if it is neither of these and even if our assessment is that it does not represent a first step, Irish Republicans should not allow that judgment to influence unduly our considerations about taking risks. It is easier to make war than to make peace. Making peace is riskier, but the prize is worthier and the goal for us to pursue.

The consideration, and I speak here as an unapologetic Irish Republican, of any option must be in the context of our broad peace objectives and the strategy that I have outlined for their achievement. These are

1. to eradicate the causes of conflict in Ireland;
2. to bring about the exercise of the right of national self-determination of the Irish people as a whole;
3. to establish a peace process to achieve those objectives.

The issue of self-determination is obviously central to the resolution of the conflict. The issue has been identified and is firmly on the political agenda. A framework has also been identified and has been accepted by the vast majority of people in Britain and in Ireland.

Any agreement must respect the diversity of our traditions in Ireland and earn the allegiance of all our people. Present policies, policies from the past, and present political structures have prevented this from happening.



The joint declaration is described by its authors as "the first step." Sinn Fein is committed to a peace settlement, and I am eager to be persuaded that the Downing Street Declaration can provide the basis for peace. Even if this proves not to be the case, if there is a gap between what is required and what is an offer, then we need to move to bridge that gap.

## **CLARIFYING THE PROPOSED PEACE PROCESS**

Sinn Fein and the wider nationalist community and the unionist community are examining the Downing Street declaration, and nationalists are examining it in the context of the overall search for a real and lasting peace. Those are the criteria within which it will be judged: whether it seeks to advance the peace process in a real way or is a cosmetic response by the British to the Irish peace initiative.

There is therefore an understandable degree of suspicion given the history that I have outlined of the last three years as well as skepticism among Irish nationalists and particularly among republicans regarding the real motives and intentions of the British government. If the British government genuinely wishes to move forward and if any message goes out from here today (and this message is going out from Belfast and from Dublin to the British government), the first step must be for the British government to accept its obligation to provide clarification for Sinn Fein on these matters. It has already done so for all the other political parties. Its refusal to provide clarification for Sinn Fein has to be a matter of deep concern for everyone interested in peace.

In contrast, the attitude of the Dublin government has been much more constructive. It is clear that for the first time since the treaty, a Dublin government is making a serious attempt to address the issues of peace and a political settlement in Ireland, and this is a development that I welcome and on which we seek to build. The first, tentative step in what may be difficult and at times frustrating task has been taken. The Taoiseach, Albert Reynolds, has already taken steps to clarify his positions in relation to all of these key issues. I am hopeful that this will assist all of us in assessing the declaration and how it can contribute to the overall peace process.

In this context, I wish to commend Albert Reynolds. He has taken a common-sense attitude to the need to provide clarification. A letter from Mr. Reynolds awaits me on my return to Ireland, and I hope that it contains, as I have been told, Dublin's view of these core issues.

Our inability to come to a definitive attitude, however, is tied to the British refusal to provide clarification. In other words, the sooner they provide this, the sooner we can move forward. I hope that John Major will follow the only logical reason for the British government to refuse to provide clarification can be that they are working to achieve their own political agenda.

Since the signing of the declaration, contradictory commentaries about its meaning and significance have been made by the British and the Irish governments. In clarifying declaration for James Molyneaux, the Ulster party leader who has in many ways congratulated us by his absence today, John Major said that the declaration meant.

- no to the value of achieving a united Ireland;
- no to a unified Ireland; no to Britain joining the persuaders;
- no to any timetable for a united Ireland;
- no to joint authority;
- no to any change in the unionist veto;
- no to a Dublin say in the affairs of the North;



This view, as summarized in Mr. Major's interpretation, is at odds, with the Irish government's understanding of the joint declaration.

There are three main areas that need to be clarified. They are aspects of the declaration itself. The statements made by its authors, which contradict each other. Then there is the whole issue of processes, measures, and steps envisaged.

In its first paragraph the declaration is described by the governments as the "first step." What then is the second step? Or the third step? What processes are envisioned—what measures will be taken to move the situation forward?

These are reasonable questions to be asked, especially to be asked, by a party that has an electoral mandate. Clarifications have been given to all other parties. Why not Sinn Fein? And, of course, what kind of signal are the British seeking to send to us by their stalling and delaying tactics? There is little evidence that they are willing to join the persuaders. Are they? The Dublin government raises the issue, for example, of political prisoners and says there should be an amnesty as part of a settlement. Downing Street says no. Downing Street has also dismissed Albert Reynolds's suggestion about demilitarizing the situation. So what we have at the moment is a free-standing, significant but free-standing, joint statement. Where will it lead? We have been told that the British government is going to facilitate and engage. What program do they envisage to do this? No matter the validity of anyone else's interpretation of the Downing Street declaration, the British government's view of these matters is the crucial one.

And despite all that, the potential for peace in Ireland has never been more realizable. If the British believe that they have the basis for a settlement, they must tell us what it is. I have already said that if there is a gap between what has been offered and what is required to move us out of conflict, then everyone involved has a responsibility to bridge that gap. This will require courage, imagination, and flexibility. I have stated my willingness to assist in this process by going the extra mile.

Presently Sinn Fein is conducting peace forums in Ireland that are open to everyone. We are actively seeking to engage in an open and democratic way with citizens who wish to engage us in a dialogue about how peace can be established. It is our intention to publicize the oral and written submissions received by us. We have no hidden agenda. We have only an interest in peace. Peace needs people to build and sustain it, and our consultative process is a modest way of securing the direct involvement of citizens.

## **THE UNITED STATES DIMENSION**

It is clear that international interest and concern can also play an important and constructive part in the development of a viable peace process. There has been a consistent need for the international community to exercise its good will and influence to assist in the resolution of conflict worldwide. This is generally recognized and on many occasions has been acted on. It has not, however, been a factor in the Anglo-Irish conflict. This situation needs to be rectified.

There is widespread interest and concern about Ireland within North American public opinion. This stems, as I and other speakers have outlined, from the historical links between the two countries and the large Irish-American community in the United States. The potential has therefore always existed for people here to play a part in the construction of an effective response to human rights abuses, and this was done, particularly in relation to the MacBride Campaign for Fair Employment. It is only proper that this potential should be harnessed and utilized in the wider search for a lasting settlement, and I would appeal to all those in civic, political, and industrial leadership positions in



the United States to engage their energies in this direction. We have to find a solution ourselves, but we need assistance to do that.

Progressive opinion here in North America can assist in the development of a peace process. There is an urgent need to break the current deadlock and to move the situation forward toward a negotiated settlement. The U.S. government can play a significant and positive role in encouraging this by helping to create a climate in which the situation can be moved. It can do this by facilitating the free exchange of information, and in this context I commend President Clinton for the waiver of visa denial that has allowed me to address you directly and at length here today. The U.S. government can further assist at a wider level by seeking to encourage continuing dialogue.

Sinn Fein has played and has helped to play a significant role in moving the situation from an apparently intractable conflict to one in which there is now a focus on resolving the issues involved. I welcome the substantial and significant support on all of these matters here and from you who are making here today a concrete contribution to the search for peace.

Let me reaffirm to you my commitment to move this situation on. The opportunity to seize the prize of peace for the Irish people and for the British people is too important to be squandered. Sinn Fein will seek therefore to overcome any obstacles and to be resourceful and imaginative about how we encourage and develop the peace process. We will continue to press ahead with our peace strategy and our search for a negotiated settlement and for a lasting peace in our country. It is our firm intention to remove and to see the removal of the gun from Irish politics, and we believe that this conference today has made a unique and valuable contribution to this process.

