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Address by the Taoiseach, Mr. Liam Cosgrave, T.D.,
to a combined meeting of Dun Laoghaire Constituency
Executive, Fine Gael, and all Branches in the
Dun Laoghaire Constituency at the Hotel Victor,
Dun Laoghaire, on Monday, the 12th January, 1976.

NCT FOR RELEASE BEFORE 9 p.m. on Monday, 12th January, 1976

There are many issues, both national and local, which we could usefully discuss at our meeting here tonight. But against the background of violence in Northern Ireland, especially since Christmas, I want to use this opportunity to make clear once again the attitude of the Government, shared by ninety-nine per cent of the people of this part of this country - and equally, I know, by the vast majority of both communities in Northern Ireland - to the brutal killings there and to the terrorists responsible for them.

There is a danger, to which I have referred before, that people here may become so numbed by the seemingly interminable violence and by their apparent inability to do anything to stop it, that they may be tempted to turn away from the plight of people north of the Border. There may be a feeling on the part of some members of the minority community there that people here are not sufficiently concerned about assassinations and violence by so-called loyalists. There are

certainly those among the majority community who think that we are not doing enough to combat violence by so-called republicans. There are some who think that it is condoned and abetted by people in this part of the country.

To those, in either community, who may hold such views, I want to say that they are gravely mistaken. We do not condone political violence from any source. I am speaking for the vast majority of the people when I say that there is recognition on all sides here of the suffering of the ordinary people in both parts of the community in Northern Ireland and a tremendous sympathy with all of them, without distinction of creed or political affiliation. With this is joined a determination to do all we can to eliminate violence and establish a just and lasting peace in this island. It should not after all be impossible for us, three quarters of our way through the 20th century, to provide the conditions in which ordinary men and women can live their lives without fear of the assassin's bullet or of random death from terrorist bombs.

What is being done by terrorists in Northern Ireland is not alone an offence against a government or an institution. It is a crime against people and against ordinary human decency. It is no longer a struggle for or against an ideal - it is a senseless and open brutality which is destroying the sort of society in which any ideal but that of survival can exist.

In our view there are two approaches to the problem. The first, which we are following wholeheartedly, lies in helping to contain the violence which is destroying personal and community life in Northern Ireland. The primary responsibility for this lies, of course, with the British Government who are responsible for order and security. We are in touch with the British authorities at all levels on this matter.

We have frequently represented to them the need to provide effective security for all the people in Northern Ireland, to halt sectarian assassinations, to prevent illegal organisations operating openly and with impunity in any area and to avoid actions which lend credence to the pretensions of these organisations at the expense of democratically elected representatives. We recognise the difficulties faced by the British authorities - difficulties of terrain, difficulties arising from fear and intimidation, as well as the sheer random nature of so many of the killings. We have received assurances that intensified security action will be directed with an even hand against all in either community who commit crimes of violence.

There is evidence of these assurances in the statement made by the British Prime Minister, Mr. Wilson, in the House of Commons in Westminster this afternoon, when he announced further measures

against men of violence in Northern Ireland. The Government acknowledge the close co-operation between the police forces on both sides of the border in counteracting terrorism. And, following the meeting last week between the Minister for Justice and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, they intend that this co-operation should continue and be extended. We will not permit any part of this island to be a haven for those who commit murder, whatever their professed motive. But co-operation at this level is insufficient, no matter how full or how well directed.

We believe that it is particularly important, just now, to build up the confidence of each community that security is equal for all to retain the goodwill towards the security forces which is increasingly manifest. I would hope that an impartial and effective security policy which avoided counter-productive actions would evoke a response, in more full-hearted and explicit support for the security forces. We know, in this part of the country, that the effectiveness of the Gardai is heavily dependent on the co-operation they receive from the public. The absolute priority in the North at present is to save lives. I would say to leaders of opinion there that any action on their part that serves this purpose cannot but help towards a fair and workable political settlement.

I have said that security in the North is primarily a British responsibility. This is not to deny that there is a heavy responsibility on us in this part of the country to do all we can to help to prevent murder, assassination and bombings. Killers may, on occasions, seek to avail of the Border to evade pursuit whether by the security forces in the North or here. This can and does occur. British spokesmen have themselves stressed the difficulties of terrain and these have been acknowledged by leading writers in Northern newspapers who recently inspected our security effort on the Border.

The fact that much of the violence is perpetrated in the name of the Irish people and in the cause of Irish unity imposes a duty on us to do everything possible to ensure that this part of the country is not a base for attacks in the North, or a source of arms or explosives, or a haven for fugitives. We are meeting our obligations in this respect. We have raised the strength of the Army so that its complement is greater than at any time since the Second World War. Last year, the Army carried out more than 4,000 patrols along the Border and operated more than 11,000 checkpoints, acting in aid of the civil power. The Garda Síochána too are at their highest strength for many years. They have had some notable successes but these are only the more publicised of a steady stream of arrests and convictions for crimes of violence.

Since the re-establishment of the Special Criminal Court, there have been about 700 such convictions. We have imposed strict controls on possession of firearms and on the storage, movement and use of explosives. We are putting the Criminal Law Jurisdiction Bill through the legislature with all speed.

Our security effort is costly. Last year, the cost of the Army and of the Gárda was about £120 million. But we know that, in acting as we have done, we have the full support of our people. For apart from their natural human desire to prevent suffering, they realise full well the threat posed to democratic government throughout Ireland by the illegal organisations whose political fronts they have emphatically and repeatedly repudiated at the ballot box. But while we are taking every measure open to us to help in eliminating violence, we remain firmly of the view that the only sound basis for peace is a political settlement between elected representatives of both communities, involving the participation of these communities in government and with recognition in whatever way is thought most suitable of the need to develop, positively and naturally, the special relationship between the two parts of Ireland in such fields as security and economic and social matters.

Security measures cannot of themselves provide any lasting peace in Northern Ireland. If the lessons of the past fifty years have meant anything, they have meant that there can be no stable and effective

government in Northern Ireland without the support of both sections of the community there. It does not matter whether the primary responsibility for this government rests within Northern Ireland or outside it. In fact, what I have said is not an observation confined to Northern Ireland alone. Nowhere in the world, except perhaps in countries where democracy is at a low ebb or non-existent, does a stable government exist without the support of all sections of the community which it has the duty of governing.

For this support in Northern Ireland, we believe that participation by both sections of the community in the institutions of government is necessary. Without this participation, there is the clear danger of alternative institutions and parallel systems of order and business being established which do not acknowledge allegiance to government elected by the people. In this sort of community, divided deeply in itself, law and order - the stability of society itself on which all progress depends - are impossible. I do not claim that this is any new concept or theory of government. It is, in fact, clearly established by the events of two generations in Northern Ireland. That is why we here in government give our support fully and unequivocally to the idea of an administration in Northern Ireland in which both parts of the community share and to which both give their full allegiance. We share with the British Government the belief expressed by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in the House of Commons today, that the Convention proposals as they have so far

emerged do not enjoy the support of both sections of the community in Northern Ireland to the extent that they can provide the basis for stable and effective government there.

For our part, we maintain our aspiration to eventual unity but we recognise that this unity cannot be achieved by any declarations or expressions of intention which in the present inflamed atmosphere in Northern Ireland can only raise emotions and tensions to a dangerous level. We recognise that, just as the minority in Northern Ireland seeks recognition, those who are a minority in all the island must have their recognition. We say that unity can be achieved only with the consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland and by peaceful means. Consent must be won by respect and tolerance. It cannot be extorted.

In conclusion, I should like all here to renew the strength of their commitment to the sacredness of human life. This commitment is the foundation of our civilisation. I would ask you all to impress the importance of this on all with whom you come in contact and to continue your efforts to strengthen support for the Government's policies - policies which are designed to safeguard the principle of the sacredness of human life and to restore the good name of our country.