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Background note on the Report of the New Ireland Forum
Issued by the Department of Foreign Affairs on behalf
of the Irish Government

2 May 1984

The Report is the product of deliberation over a period of 11 months by the four principal nationalist parties in Ireland which represent between them more than 70% of the people of Ireland. These parties are:

Fine Gael

Fianna Fail

The Labour Party

The Social Democratic and Labour Party

The objective of the Forum was to devise ideas through which lasting peace and stability could be achieved in Ireland through the democratic process.

The Forum met altogether 97 times and received 317 submissions.

Analysis of the problem

The Forum Report analyses the background to the Northern Ireland problem which is marked by division and continuing violence. The division of Ireland under the Government of Ireland Act 1920 is seen as the root cause of the failure of nationalists and unionists to reach a mutual accommodation. (Chapter 3).

The Forum considers that the immediate outlook for the North is extremely dangerous unless an acceptable political solution is achieved. The long-term damage to society worsens each day that passes without political progress. In political, moral and human terms there is no acceptable level of violence. There are at present no political institutions to which a majority of people of the nationalist and unionist traditions

can give their common allegiance or even their acquiescence. (2.4).

The Forum Report contends that 'the greatest threat to the paramilitary organisations would be determined, constitutional action to reach and sustain a just and equitable solution and thus to break the vicious cycle of violence and repression'. (3.18).

Detailed aspects of the problem are analysed in several reports published separately by the Forum:

The Cost of Violence Arising from the Northern Ireland Situation since 1969;

The Economic Consequences of the Division of Ireland since 1920;

A Comparative Description of the Economic Structure and Situation, North and South;

The Macroeconomic Consequences of Integrated Economic Policy, Planning and Co-ordination in Ireland;

The Legal System of the Republic of Ireland and of Northern Ireland.

Present Realities and Future Requirements

X | Following the analysis in the earlier chapters of the Report of the historical background to the present situation in Northern Ireland, the Forum also sets out its view of the rights and interests of each of the major protagonists to the present crisis. In the view of the Irish Government the "operational" part of the Report is set out in the first two sections of Chapter 5 which describe the "Present Realities and Future Requirements". In effect, these two sections set out, in the words of the Report, a "framework for a New Ireland". The Forum calls on the British Government to "recognise these Realities and give effect to these Requirements".

The "Realities" comprise ~~eight~~^{eleven} descriptive "elements", which summarise the Forum's analysis of the problem of Northern Ireland:

Chapter 5.1 (1) to 5.1 (11)

- (1) Existing structures and practices in Northern Ireland have failed to provide either peace, stability or reconciliation. The failure to recognise and accommodate the identity of Northern nationalists has resulted in deep and growing alienation on their part from the system of political authority.
- (2) The conflict of nationalist and unionist identities has been concentrated within the narrow ground of Northern Ireland. This has prevented constructive interaction between the two traditions and fostered fears, suspicions and misunderstandings.
- (3) One effect of the division of Ireland is that civil law and administration of the South are seen particularly by unionists, as being unduly influenced by the majority ethos on issues which Protestants consider to be a matter for private conscience and there is a widespread perception that the South in its laws, attitudes and values does not reflect a regard for the ethos of Protestants. On the other hand, Protestant values are seen to be reflected in the laws and practices in the North.
- (4) The present formal position of the British Government, namely the guarantee, contained in Section 1 of the Northern Ireland Constitution Act, 1973 has in its practical application had

the effect of inhibiting the dialogue necessary for political progress. It has had the additional effect of removing the incentive which would otherwise exist on all sides to seek a political solution.

- (5) The above factors have contributed to conflict and instability with disastrous consequences involving violence and loss of life on a large scale in Northern Ireland.
- (6) The absence of political consensus, together with the erosion of the North's economy and social fabric threatens to make irreversible the drift into more widespread civil conflict with catastrophic consequences.
- (7) The resulting situation has inhibited and placed under strain the development of normal relations between Britain and Ireland.
- (8) The nationalist identity and ethos comprise a sense of national Irish identity and a democratically founded wish to have that identity institutionalised in a sovereign Ireland united by consent.
- (9) The unionist identity and ethos comprise a sense of Britishness, allied to their particular sense of Irishness and a set of values comprising a Protestant ethos which they believe to be under threat from a Catholic ethos, perceived as reflecting different and often opposing values.
- (10) Irish nationalist attitudes have hitherto in their public expression tended to underestimate the full dimension of the unionist identity and ethos. On the other hand, unionist attitudes and

practices have denied the right of nationalists to meaningful political expression of their identity and ethos.

- (11) The basic approach of British policy has created negative consequences. It has shown a disregard of the identity and ethos of nationalists. In effect, it has underwritten the supremacy in Northern Ireland of the unionist identity. Before there can be fundamental progress Britain must re-assess its position and responsibility.

The "Requirements" are the ^{Criteria} principles which the Forum has identified which must be ^{met} accommodated ^{by} in any just and workable solution to the Northern Ireland problem:

Chapters 5.2(1) to 5.1(10)

- (1) A fundamental criterion of any new structures and processes must be that they will provide lasting peace and stability;
- (2) Attempts from any quarter to impose a particular solution through violence must be rejected along with the proponents of such methods. It must be recognised that the new Ireland which the Forum seeks can come about only through agreement and must have a democratic basis;
- (3) Agreement means that the political arrangements for a new and sovereign Ireland would have to be freely negotiated and agreed to by the people of the North and by the people of the South;
- (4) The validity of both the nationalist and unionist identities in Ireland and the democratic rights of every citizen on this island must be accepted; both of these identities must have

equally satisfactory, secure and durable, political, administrative and symbolic expression and protection;

(5) Lasting stability can be found only in the context of new structures in which no tradition will be allowed to dominate the other, in which there will be equal rights and opportunities for all, and in which there will be provision for formal and effective guarantees for the protection of individual human rights and of the communal and cultural rights of both nationalists and unionists;

(6) Civil and religious liberties and rights must be guaranteed and there can be no discrimination or preference in laws or administrative practices, on grounds of religious, belief or affiliation; government and administration must be sensitive to minority beliefs and attitudes and seek consensus;

(7) New arrangements must provide structures and institutions including security structures with which both nationalists and unionists can identify on the basis of political consensus; such arrangements must overcome alienation in Northern Ireland and strengthen stability and security for all the people of Ireland;

(8) New arrangements must ensure the maintenance of economic and social standards and facilitate, where appropriate, integrated economic development, North and South. The macro-economic and financial implications are dealt with in a study by DKM Economic Consultants published with this Report, which is based on a range of

assumptions with regard to the availability of external financial transfers;

- (9) The cultural and linguistic diversity of the people of all traditions, North and South, must be preserved and fostered as a source of enrichment and vitality;
- (10) Political action is urgently required to halt disillusionment with democratic politics and the slide towards further violence. Britain has a duty to respond now in order to ensure that the people of Northern Ireland are not condemned to yet another generation of violence and sterility. The parties in the Forum by their participation in this work have already committed themselves to join in a process directed towards that end.

The Forum goes on to state that the British Government have a duty to join in developing the necessary process that will recognise these realities and give effect to these requirements and thus promote reconciliation between the two major traditions in Ireland: and to make the required investment of political will and resources. The British and Irish Governments should enter into discussions to create the framework and atmosphere necessary for this purpose.

Violence

The Forum repeatedly condemns the use of violence and support for violence in trenchant terms. "The Forum rejects and condemns paramilitary organisations and all who resort to terror and murder to achieve their ends. It strongly urges people in Ireland of all traditions and all those who are concerned about Ireland elsewhere in the world to refuse any support or sympathy to these paramilitary bodies and associated organisations. The acts of murder and violence of these organisations and their denial of the legitimate rights of

others, have the effect of undermining all efforts to secure peace and political progress." (4.11).

(c.f. also 3.17, 3.18, 3.19, 3.20 and 5.2(4), 5.4, 5.6).

The Unionist and Nationalist Identities

The recognition by the Forum of three constituent elements in the identity of the Unionist tradition represents a fundamental advance in the acknowledgement by constitutional Irish nationalism of the identity and rights of that tradition. The Forum acknowledges these elements in the self-identification of the Unionist tradition:

- Britishness
- Protestantism
- The economic advantages of the British link.

The Forum accepts the definition of the Unionist identity stated in the section on "Realities" (5.1(7) above).

The Forum has also defined the Nationalist identity and ethos (para. 5.1(6) above).

The Taoiseach has described as the "central operational principle" of the Report of the New Ireland Forum, the principle that both the Nationalist and the Unionist identities, as defined by the Forum, must be accepted and must have equally satisfactory, secure and durable, political, administrative and symbolic expression and protection (5.2(3)).

Note: The definition of the Nationalist identity is developed in paras. 4.65, 4.7 and 5.1(6). That of the Unionist identity is developed in 4.8, 4.9, 4.10 and 5.1(7). The rights of both traditions and the need to accommodate both identities are set out in paras. 4.11, 4.12, 4.13, 4.14, 4.15, 4.16 and 5.2(3).

Irish Unity

The nationalist parties in the Forum naturally share "a sense of national Irish identity and a democratically found wish to

have that identity institutionalised in a sovereign Ireland united by consent." (5.1(6)). The Report of the New Ireland Forum develops this common understanding at various points and particularly in Chapter 5 (5.4 - 5.8).

The Forum asserts that Irish unity should be pursued democratically and peacefully and only democratically and peacefully.

The Forum, moreover, accepts that agreement and consent are necessary to the achievement of Irish unity (5.1(6), 5.2(3), 5.4, 5.5, 5.6, 5.7 and 5.8.):

"Agreement means that the political arrangements for a new and sovereign Ireland would have to be freely negotiated and agreed to by the people of the North and the people of the South" 5.2(3).

The Forum expresses its particular preference in the following terms "The particular structure of political unity which the Forum would wish to see established is a unitary state, achieved by agreement and consent, embracing the whole island of Ireland and providing irrevocable guarantees for the protection and preservation of both the unionist and nationalist identities". (5.7). A broad outline of the unitary State model is set out in a separate chapter of the Report (B).

Other ways in which the "Realities" and "Requirements" might be accommodated

The Forum in the course of its work, in both the public and private sessions, heard suggestions put to it as to accommodating the Unionist and Nationalist identities and interests in different ways and in differing degrees in a new Ireland. The Forum gave careful consideration to these suggestions. In addition to the unitary State model, two other structural arrangements were examined in some detail, a federal/confederal state and Joint Authority. A broad outline

of these two models is set out in two separate chapters of the Report (7 and 8).

The parties in the Forum, moreover, state that they "also remain open to discuss other views which may contribute to political development." (5.10).