



10 DOWNING STREET

Press Notice

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SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER

THE RT HON JOHN MAJOR MP

AT THE INTERNATIONAL INVESTMENT FORUM DINNER

EUROPA HOTEL

BELFAST

TUESDAY 13 DECEMBER 1994

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Telephone 071-930 4433

**SPEECH FOR THE PRIME MINISTER TO INVESTMENT FORUM
DINNER IN BELFAST 13 DECEMBER 1994**

May I extend the warmest of welcomes to you all, but especially to those who have travelled long distances to be here this evening?

To Secretary Brown and his large delegation from the United States; to Mr Trojan, who has done such outstanding work in leading the European Commission's Task Force; to Mr Bonner, representing the Irish Government; to the Lord Mayor of London and leading figures from British finance and business; and to all the representatives of seven governments and 181 companies here this evening.

I shall speak about Northern Ireland's economy at the Forum tomorrow, but would like tonight to sketch out a little of the political background, including its international aspects.

Some of you will be visiting Northern Ireland for the first time. Some have been here before, but not this year.

Whether you are new friends or old, you will experience on this visit an entirely different atmosphere across Northern Ireland.

You will see, I hope, a huge difference from impressions formed in the past.

We want to show you new prospects in which you and your companies could play a part - to your advantage as well as to Northern Ireland's benefit.

Northern Ireland will welcome you with open arms, support you and do a fine job for you. You need not take this just from me. Ask the businessmen and other representatives of Northern Ireland at this dinner and Forum. Ask other investors who have already taken a stake in Northern Ireland's future.

When I became Prime Minister, I had four objectives for Northern Ireland:

- Progress in this Province would be one of the highest priorities for the Government.
- We would oppose terrorism with all democratic means, and would show the tiny minority engaged in it that terrorism would lead nowhere except, ultimately, to a prison cell.

But we would also show those who supported terrorism that they were missing out. We would demonstrate that all legitimate aspirations could be pursued peacefully through the democratic process. Those who had excluded themselves from the process could be admitted to it if they abandoned violence. But, with or without them, it would move purposefully ahead.

That was the essence of the Downing Street Declaration which Albert Reynolds and I signed just one year ago, and of the Government's political talks with the constitutional parties.

I also felt that the British and Irish Governments should try to work together as never before. If we could reconcile our own differences without compromising our principles, we could set an example for both sides of the community in Northern Ireland.

We did so in the Downing Street Declaration; and we hope soon to take a further step, by concluding a framework document to help the talks process.

That was the course I set, some would say rather optimistically. But we have now travelled a long way down it. And I want you to know that - whatever difficulties may lie ahead - the British Government's commitment to these objectives will remain steadfast.

The support of other governments and other countries will be very significant to us and to the people of Northern Ireland, for two reasons in particular.

First, terrorism here did not happen in a vacuum. Historic grievances were paraded overseas to justify it. In some places, during the Cold War, ideological connections were made. Funds were raised from East, West and South. Guns and the most deadly explosives were procured.

It is crucially important that people around the world should now appreciate what has changed. The Northern Ireland of today and tomorrow is not the Northern Ireland of 25 or 50 years ago. Northern Ireland has some of the most stringent measures for fair employment and community relations to be found anywhere in the world. There is a general recognition that a fair deal must be offered to all, that the future of this Province depends on healing those rifts which in the past tore Northern Ireland asunder.

Sinn Fein and political representatives of Loyalism have declared that they want to enter the political arena as peaceful, democratic parties. They are now beginning a historic dialogue with the Government about how this should come about, and how their weapons and explosives can be taken out of commission.

The overwhelming majority of the people of Northern Ireland want peace and are now enjoying peace - as you can see. They would not have sympathy with any who sought to disturb that peace again.

I hope that equally strong pressure to make peace irreversible will come from outside Northern Ireland. People overseas who take an interest in its affairs - wherever their sympathies may lie - should continue to speak up for peace. They should make clear that there would be no justification and not a shred of sympathy or support for any return by any group to the violent ways of the past.

By your very presence here tonight, you are giving that signal, and I am grateful to you.

Second, I would ask you to look at the economic prospects for Northern Ireland with open eyes.

A quarter of a century of terrorism held back Northern Ireland's development. Now, whether you are from Britain, the Irish Republic, from other parts of the European Union, from the United States or the Far East, you can be in at the beginning of a very exciting phase here.

As I shall explain in more detail tomorrow, you can reap the rewards of coming in early.

I am not asking you to be less than hard-headed about your business decisions. I would not expect this. I only ask you to recognise that there is a society bursting with the desire to succeed, to put the past behind it and to exploit its undoubted potential.

A society which - as you will see from its many success stories - has achieved much despite its troubles.

Their endeavour to succeed has the wholehearted backing of the British Government and the European Union, and strong support from the governments of the United States and other countries.

We intend to consolidate peace by showing what each and every person in Northern Ireland stands to gain from it. And already the evidence is around us. In this fine hotel, which has shed the scars of past attacks. In other hotels, now filling their rooms for the first time in years. At the airports, where extra services and new routes are appearing. And in streets crowded with Christmas shoppers - many coming in record numbers from Dublin and elsewhere in the Republic.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Government's vision for Northern Ireland is one where both main communities will be able to feel comfortable and threatened by none; where both communities will feel that their aspirations and identities are respected as legitimate; where both communities will recognise that they have more in common, by way of both history and challenges, than separates them; and where, perhaps above all, they all have a fair and equitable stake in growing prosperity, fairly distributed.

I am grateful to you for leaving your homes and your offices to come here in the busy Christmas season.

Nowhere in the world will Christmas be celebrated more joyously than here in Northern Ireland.

Nowhere will the traditional greetings of peace and goodwill have deeper meaning.

With your help, I believe that, at long last, this season of peace can mark the beginning of a peace for all seasons in Northern Ireland.

For all seasons.

For all people.

For all time.

That is the objective we seek.

Your presence tonight will play a part in achieving it.