



**ADDRESS BY
THE SDLP
LEADER**

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**TO THE
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CONFERENCE
OF THE SDLP**

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This speech delivered by John Hume MEP, MP, to the 15th Annual Conference of the SDLP in Belfast on 9 November, 1985 sets out clearly the strategy and policy being pursued by the SDLP in order to resolve the deep problems of Ireland. The speech was delivered six days before the Anglo-Irish Agreement was signed on 15 November.

The SDLP has been in existence for fifteen years. Yes, only fifteen years. In every one of those years there has been talk of our demise. This year is no exception. I suppose we cannot blame those who think like that. The past fifteen years have provided anything but fruitful or fertile ground for the tender growth and growing pains of a young political party. Fifteen years that have seen over two thousand, five hundred people lose their lives in political violence. Fifteen years that have seen over twenty thousand people maimed. Fifteen years that have seen eleven million pounds' worth of bomb damage inflicted on the economies, North and South, with countless job losses. Fifteen years that have seen two new prisons built and and a third about to be open. Fifteen years that have seen the steady rise of unemployment to the highest point in our history. Fifteen years that have seen numerous attempts to uphold the rule of law by bending the rule of law- internment, interrogation methods proved as torture, shoot-to-kill policies, strip searching of women in prison and now supergrasses. Fifteen years that have seen the new generation of young who have known nothing but only armed soldiers, policemen and violence on the streets and have now come of age with little hope of work.

Hardly fifteen years, one would think, in which a democratic political party would be founded, let alone grow. Not only are we not in government, we aren't even in opposition. Most of our frontline men and women who sit behind me on this platform have served without any reward, financial or otherwise, without even an income. Yes, here we are, our roots are tough and we are here to stay. We are here not, as the saying goes, because we are here, but because we don't like what it means to be here but we have been doing something about it.

There are those who think of the possible demise of the SDLP and its dedicated commitment to the non-violence because they say nothing has changed, nothing has been achieved. It is therefore perhaps necessary, not for purposes of self congratulation, to remind people of the changes that

have taken place, changes in which this Party has played a major role, and the achievement of which is all the more significant against the background outlined.

When we set out fifteen years ago the Civil Rights demands were somewhat different to those that are to the forefront today. They were one man one vote, fair housing allocation and an end to job discrimination. Gerrymander was rife, the voting system was unfair and used by unionists to control housing and jobs. Housing conditions in many parts of the North were appalling. Today the housing situation throughout Northern Ireland has been transformed due to the creation of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, a proposal by the SDLP put to the British government of the day and accepted by them, thereby taking housing out of the hands of local unionist politicians. This has meant a major transformation in the living conditions of people throughout Northern Ireland. While the SDLP was battling through the ballot box and in dialogue with the British government to achieve these changes, some of our present day opponents and alleged champions of working class issues were telling people to burn their votes, the ballot box was a waste of time. The electoral and local government system has been drastically altered with the introduction of PR, smashing gerrymander at local level and drastically reducing the power of political bigots. This Party has today the dedicated service of more than one hundred councillors right across the North. They have consistently worked to improve the quality of life in the communities they serve as witnessed by the community and leisure centres and the educational and health services distributed on a much more community wide basis. The Fair Employment Agency for which we want more teeth, is and has been a valuable watchdog in exposing, and making more difficult, discrimination by public bodies.

On the jobs front though, the combination of international recession, monetarism and violence has worsened the situation. The SDLP has fought the neutron bomb economics of Margaret Thatcher which leaves factories standing

without people and the terror bomb economics of the Provos which destroys factories and leaves people standing on the dole queues. One closes down work places by hitting at uneconomic targets, the other blows up work places by blowing up economic targets. The victims in both cases are the people we represent. And do not let us forget that the last fifteen years included 1974 when, less than four years after our foundation, we shared responsibility for some of the administration for this part of the world. Let us remember that in May 1974, when bigots destroyed that enterprise, that at 5% Northern Ireland's unemployment rate was at its lowest ever. As Minister of Commerce I was negotiating four thousand, four hundred jobs for Newry alone.

Neither should we forget that, though a small Party, we have won respect for ourselves in the wider world as evidenced by the attendance here today of our friends from West Germany, France, Britain, the United States and of course the three parties from the South which have stood with us through thick and thin. Part of that respect we have comes from the fact that, in spite of our own problems, we recognise that in 1985 we live in a wider world and must play our part, however small, in combating, together with our friends, the problems of that wider world. As a Party we stand four square in the tradition of social democratic and labour parties everywhere, knowing that there is no perfect society, and that there never will be, and that the task of democratic politicians who stand for progressive change is always to narrow the gap between what is and what ought to be. Although we have sought assistance with our problems from the outside world we have something to give as well from our long experience as a people. It is no accident that it was an Irishman, Bob Geldof, who has done most to awaken the conscience of the world to the problem of world hunger. It is no accident that per head of population the Irish contributed more to the Live Aid Appeal and the entire famine relief effort than any other country in the world. As I said recently in a speech in the American Senate building:

"Our country knew famine in the last century. It is for that reason that our country has been so moved by the present suffering of Africa. We know that our famines were not simply natural disasters. History shows that Irish people were starved, or forced to leave their native land, because of unjust distribution of land, poverty and extortion which forced the production of cash crops for the wealthy abroad instead of food for the hungry at home, trade structures which knew no morality and unequal power relations between countries. These are the same injustices and absurdities which crucify Africa today. Our famine brought the starving to America and to the rest of the world. May the present famine bring America and the rest of the world to the starving".

World hunger demands change, not just charity. These problems makes ours pale into insignificance as does the other great issue, the awesome stockpiling of nuclear weapons. This issue is intrinsically interlinked with world hunger. Over one million pounds per minute goes into the provision of weapons whose only potential is to destroy this earth. The transfer of those vast resources to the developing world would not only solve the problem of starvation but would transform world markets and end unemployment in the developed world as well.

As a small country which has experienced colonialism, exploitation and conflict, we should have a strong and respected independent voice in the world on these issues. We know from hard experience that the nuclear arms race did not begin with the election of Ronald Reagan or the discovery of plutonium. It begins with the acceptance of force or might as a means of maintaining or achieving political dominance. It does not take an etymologist to tell the SDLP that terrorism and deterrence in the end are about the same thing - force and fear. We know that when we are dealing with human conflict, whether in a divided community, a divided country or a divided globe that it is the building of mutual trust and not mutual fear that will solve the problem

of conflict, not just in Ireland but on the globe because we know that human beings are no different wherever they live. We agree, whether in Ireland or globally, with Martin Luther King,
"We still have a choice today: non violent co-existence or violent co-annihilation."

Existence itself is, of course, a problem for many in our society in terms of poverty, deprivation and unemployment. Occasionally voices, usually opponents', are heard to suggest that the SDLP does not pay sufficient attention to these issues. A glance at the agenda of this and previous Conferences will nail that lie. A glance at the work of our local councillors, constituency representatives and Party spokesmen will nail it even further.

Our society carries a heavy burden of economic difficulty and social inequality. We have the highest levels of unemployment in Western Europe, in many families for the second or third generation. Any strategy for the future that does not address these issues will go nowhere. Yet poverty and deprivation are being deepened daily by the scourge of violence and the cuts of monetarism.

The Welfare State, designed to erase poverty, is under attack by the present British government. Their proposals in the Social Security Review are designed to attack, not poverty, but the poor. Their strategy is the redistribution of poverty. They claim to be rationalising the Social Security System, they are in fact rationing social security. This is the single most serious social issue facing this community and is the major debate on our agenda for this Conference. Twinned with the assault on benefit levels, the government is pursuing a low-wage strategy. Their thesis is that poverty is the answer to unemployment.

This Party has been to the forefront of the campaign to resist and defeat this heartless strategy, just as in fighting the devastating cuts in our Health Service. The primary

consideration in the Health Service must be care and not cash. "The Price is Right" appears to be the social slogan of Thatcherism. It is a good title for a TV game show but hardly a policy for running a hospital service. It is hardly a motto for the provision of social services for the disabled. It is hardly a comfort to child heart patients or kidney dialysis patients. Compassion, not competition, should be our motto and that motto emerges from the work of our Party and the sentiments of our Conference agenda.

Respect and care for the elderly has been a hall mark of all civilised societies. But in recent times we have seen the government devalue the basic pension. Fuel and transport concessions to the elderly are refused. The Home Help Service is being cut and threatened with privatisation and the Social Security Review threatens pensions provision and other benefits in a manner that can only create a timebomb of poverty in old age. Others, meanwhile, distress old people by needless riots, take over their houses to launch attacks on property and people, rob their pensions from post offices and even shoot a retired man in a bar because he turned around at the wrong time.

This is International Year of Youth. Forty four percent of our population are under 25. Yet what is happening? Wage protection is removed in many sectors for those under 25. Funding of youth training, yes, funding of job creation programmes, no. Youth unemployment is treated as a problem of youth, not a problem of unemployment. Student support has been cut, Housing Benefit Allowances for 16-18 year olds have been cut and benefit levels for the under 25 years are to be cut. This is all happening in the International Year of Youth. It makes one wonder about next year, the International Year of Peace.

We as a Party are in the forefront of the fight against this attitude and this philosophy. We do so fortified by the solidarity of our friends in the Socialist movement right across Europe who work for economic prosperity, not for the

wealth it can produce for some, but for the welfare it can provide for all.

This Party has also been to the forefront in the defence of human and civil rights in this society. Our spokesman for Justice is the Deputy Leader, Seamus Mallon. The basic principle that has guided our Party is that justice and law and order in any democratic society must be based on consensus and not on repression. On behalf of the Party, Seamus Mallon, in relentlessly pursuing that principle, has had to confront people with some unpalatable truths leading to the accusation that he speaks only for a wing of this Party. He speaks for this entire Party and I commend in particular his ruthless and detailed exposé of the shoot-to-kill policy which has led to the Stalker Report, the outcome and publication of which we await with interest.

Agriculture is our biggest single industry. We make no apology for being the first political Party to make it a political issue with our concentration in particular on the problems of our small farmers. The record of achievement and representation is there at all levels and is continuing as evidenced by our pioneering the demand for a Rural Development Programme.

In short, on virtually every issue which faced this community in the past fifteen years the SDLP has been there and continues to be there. In times of turbulence we have been the only anchor for democracy and in times of stagnation the only engine for change. Let people consider the past fifteen years without the SDLP. Our importance becomes starkly obvious when the alternatives are considered.

We have three unionist parties, Alliance, DUP and OUP. I told Alliance when they were formed that you can't build a bridge from the middle of the river. They didn't listen but they have now scrambled ignominiously on to the unionist bank. As for the differences between OUP and DUP, I am

reminded of the old advertisement for soup - "the difference is in the thickness".

In recent weeks we have been hearing old familiar sounds. Unionist leaders complain that they are kept in complete ignorance about the contents of Anglo/Irish talks, yet on the basis of that ignorance they have been issuing the familiar blood curdling threats. That is the only politics that they have ever had to have. As long as they have maintained sectarian solidarity they held all power. There was no need for the normal political processes of any democratic society, of involving themselves in the respect for, or accommodation of, differences. They speak of law and order, they mean their law and their order. The only political lesson they have ever learned they learned in 1912 and never forgot. If the British government makes any move, however modest, to change the status quo, threaten and they will back down. The lesson was repeated again in 1974 and is being repeated again with monotonous regularity. Until the British government confront this threat fairly and squarely there can be no progress towards real peace and stability on this island.

Have you ever noticed how unionist politicians never talk of tomorrow, it is always yesterday, always the past, and the past has to be preserved? The future is mentioned only with fear - a desperate paranoia as encapsulated by the local sloganeer:

"To hell with the future and long live the past,
May God in his mercy be kind to Belfast".

It is a sad condition which derives from prejudice and the wish to live apart. There can be no solution to our problem which seeks to destroy, or crush, the Protestant heritage in Ireland. It would be unthinkable. Accommodation of difference is the only basis of peace and stability in our divided society. They have been commemorating Carson recently. They should go and read him (just as the Provos should go and read Tone). They would discover that he saw

any division of this island as a tragedy. He did not want Stormont and he looked forward to one parliament for Ireland. They should even listen to the odd line dropped by Craigavon as in 1938:

"We cannot forever be apart."

Is it not time to look at new ways and means of growing together? Is that not better than the present condition which offers neither peace nor security to anyone?

Then there is the other alternative to the SDLP, the Provos under their banner of "Principled Leadership". They bomb factories and shout about unemployment, they shoot a teacher in a classroom, kill school bus drivers, kill people on campuses and then lecture us about education. They kill, maim and injure and they carry out attacks in hospital precincts and then they tell us about protecting the Health Service. They rob post offices, leaving people without benefit payments and then they preach to us about defending the poor. They talk about housing. When we deliver £65 million of Euro Aid for housing, Danny Morrison says it is a bribe to wean people in West Belfast away from Republicanism. In short, houses for Catholics are bad for Republicanism. We have heard that before, was that not the unionist position from 1921 to 1968? Houses for Catholics are bad for unionism? On a Friday morning their housing spokesman complains about a £6 million cut in the budget of the Housing Executive in Northern Ireland as a whole. On the same Friday evening their military wing blows up £2 million of public money in a single street. They attack the British government on Kinsale gas and they blow up the electricity inter-connector. They rightly condemn the execution of a young black poet in South Africa but they execute a young unemployed man in a back lane in the Brandywell, or they execute a trussed up young couple in the back streets of West Belfast. They condemn British brutality yet use it themselves. Are Kangaroo Courts any improvement on Diplock courts? Are punishment beatings and shootings the

answer to community crime? So much for principled leadership.

The real strategy and objectives are clear. Have the military wing create as much discontent and deprivation as possible. The more unemployment the better. Then have your political wing feed off the people's discontent. One of these days Sinn Féin will disappear up their own contradiction.

Then there is the reaction to the continuing Anglo/Irish talks. The SDLP are "collaborators"; "helping to legitimise the British presence"; "sell out"; etc. etc. Have we not heard that all before? Was that not how we were also described in the seventies because we fought elections? So when they told people not to register for their vote and to burn their vote? Now they fight elections and we hear nothing about legitimising the British presence. Instead they go into a court to a judge appointed by the British Crown to defend their democratic rights in local councils. But they will not send their leader appointed, not by the British Crown but by the people of West Belfast, to the British Parliament to defend their rights. If, of course, there are some gains or advances from the Anglo/Irish process, it will be their achievement, they say. They will claim any successes but blame others for their failures. They remind me of the cock which crowed and claimed to have turned on the sun but accepted no responsibility for the rain.

The SDLP is and has been the only alternative to all of that. But it is not enough to be against others. The path to the future that we chart must be very clear for all to see. The trauma and tragedy of partition has distorted for many the view of the real path to ending divisions among the people of Ireland. In the aftermath of that trauma many simply felt that it would not last.

Others were preoccupied with the terrible tragedy of the Civil War and its bitter aftermath and then with the building up of a respected small state in the South: the dream was kept alive by strong words. But that is no longer enough for

today's generation, particularly today's generation of young people. As De Valera, after forty years' experience of dealing with the problem, said so clearly in 1957:

"If strong words or deep thought could solve partition easily it would have been solved long ago."

How right he has proven to be.

Today's generation in the North, 44% of which is under 25, is at every level much more politicised and much more educated than their predecessors. They are also born of hard experience and reality. They live in a shrinking world where they're as much concerned with the starvation of Africa as with their own deprivation. They live in a world where they can make instant comparisons with the living standards, values and political performance of the rest of the world. They are our real wealth. Our young people, and I am glad to see so many of them in this Party and in this gathering today, are the only explosive weapons that either this society or this Party will ever need. There may be gold in the Sperrins and I certainly hope so, and I hope especially that the people of the Sperrins get their share of it. There may be oil or gas in Fermanagh or lignite on the shores of Lough Neagh. But no amount of gold, gas, oil or money from EEC or America compares with our greatest national resource - people and young people in particular.

Without people any country is but a jungle. The energy of our young is our real wealth. That must be channelled by the political leadership of this country, not into destruction born of frustration or political cul-de-sacs but with the development of Ireland politically, culturally, socially and economically. That can only be done if a clear, sensible and honest path to the future which they can understand is charted for them and to which their energies are harnessed. A diet of strong words or flag waving is no longer good enough. Emotional rhetoric is useless if it leaves our greatest natural resources expending their talents in building other

countries and singing "Mother Machree" into their beer in New York or "The Sash My Father Wore" in Toronto.

Let us begin by facing some realities so that we understand the depth of the problem that we face. The Irish people were divided long before partition. Partition made division worse and the problems more difficult, not least in the development of the unionist paranoia of which I spoke earlier. We have only to read the remarks of Irish leaders down the centuries. Wolfe Tone, in his famous declaration long before partition, wanted to unite Ireland. It must therefore have been divided. His means was to replace Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter with the common name of Irishman. Parnell, in one of his last speeches in Belfast in 1891, thirty years before partition, said:

"Every Irish patriot from Wolfe Tone to the present has always insisted that Ireland can never be united, Ireland can never have its freedom until the prejudices of the minority are conciliated".

The Minority in this case was of course the Protestant minority in Ireland and in the North East in particular. Both men saw the breaking down of barriers between Irish men of different persuasions as a necessary prerequisite not only to unity but to real freedom itself. Sean Lemass, recognised inside and outside of this country as a man of vast experience and a great statesman, said it plainly in the sixties:

"I have on many occasions, however, expressed my own personal conviction that the primary aim must be to eliminate the barriers of suspicion and animosity which have divided the Irish people in the past so that unity can be founded on tolerance and goodwill. This is a task which has to be done in Ireland and by Irish men."

In short and in brutal honesty there are no instant solutions, there can only be a healing process. It is the duty of political leadership to spell out clearly what that process is and how it can and should be achieved. Slogans and aspirations will not suffice.

The SDLP, born out of the Civil Rights movement, has been pursuing such a strategy from its inception. We didn't find it today or yesterday or, as someone suggested, in response to the political challenge of other parties. A simple check of our record will prove that. In the seventies we called it the three R's, Reform, Reconciliation, Reunification. In essence we believe that political means means political means. It means the path of steady progress. There is no other political road. The essential task of those who believe in politics is to continue to narrow the gap between what is and what ought to be. The first step towards any sanity is the creation of total equality of treatment of all people from basic civil rights across to expression of identity. It means in essence the working for the betterment of our people in all areas, human rights, living standards, expression of identity.

On the basis of that equality, because reconciliation can only be based on equality, comes the process of reconciliation and the breaking down of barriers between the different sections of our people. No one can underestimate the difficulty of that task but it is a task that involves everyone and that will lead to the only unity that really matters, the only unity that all our pre-partition leaders spoke of, a unity that respects diversity and is based on the acceptance of diversity. I repeat again, and must repeat again and again, that every democratic country in the world that is united, is united because it accepts difference and diversity. That is a process and objective that no one need fear because all sections must be part of the building process. Those who claim that their role and objective in politics is to preserve, protect and develop the Protestant tradition in Ireland have surely much more interest in a process such as this than standing forever apart, paranoid about the future precisely because they have refused to grasp the nettle of settling their relationships with the people with whom they share this island.

The best possible framework for the advancement of this process is the British Irish framework. Firstly, because it is the framework of the problem. As we have so often said, this

problem is not just about relations within Northern Ireland. It is about relations within Ireland and between Ireland and Britain. The framework for the solution should be the framework of the problem. Secondly, and importantly for its success, it is the framework of maximum consensus. For, instead of confining consent and consensus in a population affecting fifty-nine million people to nine hundred thousand people, it seeks the full consensus of all the people involved. Thirdly, it maximises the strength of democratic Ireland. The process was begun by the Fianna Fáil government in 1980 and is now being carried on by the government of Garret FitzGerald and Dick Spring. It creates the framework in which each government and each generation can make its contribution to steady progress. Politics can be seen to be working. As Mr. Haughey put it so succinctly at the beginning of the process in 1980:

“what is now required is a willingness on the part of the two sovereign Governments, in London and Dublin respectively, to address the problem jointly by setting a wholly new context and encouraging progress towards a settlement. An immediate solution to such a longstanding and difficult issue is not, of course, possible but steps can now be taken to establish a new framework for a solution.”

The SDLP strongly supported Mr Haughey on that occasion for we believed that in political terms for a problem in which there had been little or no movement in sixty years it represented a real breakthrough.

And so today to the current British Irish talks. Our view of them is simple and clear, just as the strategy that I have just spelt out is simple and clear. We have encouraged and supported those talks. We hope they are successful. We do not expect a final settlement or an immediate solution. Our yardstick for measuring their outcome will be simple. Will the proposals which emerge from an agreement, if there is an agreement, help us to make progress with the healing process that I have outlined? If they do we will support them,

if they don't or if they place roadblocks on the way, we won't. In addition, as we learn from the experience of Sunningdale, even if there is an agreement, agreements of themselves don't make progress. There will be the question of its implementation. So no matter what the way ahead, agreement or no agreement, the SDLP will still face major challenges and major risks. There is no road towards peace and stability that does not contain risks. The challenge is not easy but the choice is. There is no other way.

There are those opponents and commentators who would have us believe that this process exists because of the electoral existence of Sinn Féin. Such a suggestion is not only an insult to the SDLP but a commentary on their own professionalism and failure to analyse. The SDLP's position has never been based on party political advantage but on proposals based on our own analysis of the problems to be solved. The strategy that we have been pursuing for years has been based on the twin pillars of building the common ground between the democratic nationalist parties in Ireland and the search for a British Irish framework. In October 1979, long before any votes were cast for Sinn Féin, when they were still burning votes, on behalf of this Party I wrote in the journal 'Foreign Affairs':

“The time has come for a positive and decisive initiative. It must be taken by both Dublin and London acting together. It should first make it clear that there are no longer any unconditional guarantees for any section of Northern community. There is only a commitment to achieving a situation in which there are guarantees for all.

“Secondly, they should make it clear that there is in fact no pat solution as such, but only a process that will lead to a solution. They should declare themselves committed to such a process, a process designed to lead to an agreed Ireland with positive roles for all. They should invite all parties to participate in this process, the process of building a new Ireland. Some groups will undoubtedly react with an initial

refusal, but the process should continue without them, leaving the door always open for their participation at any stage.

Indeed on embarking on this process we ought to be encouraged by the example of both the United States and the European Community. In the United States, in spite of deep differences of origin and background, they have formed a constitution which is able to harness great differences for the common good. Yet the Italians remain Italian, the Blacks are still Black and the Irish still parade on St Patrick's Day. They have created a unity in diversity.

Europe itself has suffered centuries of bloody conflict. In this century alone, the peoples of Europe have been locked in the savagery of two world wars with a bitterness and slaughter that goes far beyond anything that we have experienced on this island. Yet thirty-four years after the second World War, as a result of an agreed process, they have been able to create one parliament to represent them, one community - and the Germans are still Germans, the French are still French. They, too, have a unity in diversity.

Is it too much to ask that we on this small island do precisely the same thing? Is it too much to ask that these two responsible governments begin to declare themselves now in favour of such a process? Can we begin to build a unity in diversity?"

There can be no clearer exposition of either our strategy or our goals. As we face the challenges that lie ahead let us hope, not for the sake of our Party but for the sake of our people, all of them, that the current discussions do report a progress that we can all support and that all the parties to the Forum can support. May I express the hope which I am sure is shared by all the parties in the South that whatever the outcome we maintain the strength of the common approach that we have built. To do otherwise will give to those who for centuries have found the pretext for their

inexcusable neglect of this island in our divisions - the British - the excuse once again not to take us seriously or to start to take their own responsibilities seriously.

For ourselves, we know the scale of our task but we are not daunted by it. We have been tested by discrimination, bigotry and State violence but we have not been tempted by revenge. We have been hurt, misrepresented and handicapped by the violence of others but we have kept faith with our own non-violence. We have been troubled in a political vacuum but we have held true to our political values.

Our challenge is not easy, but the choice is. There is no other way. We cannot solve problems of differences by creating divisions. We cannot create peace by using violence. We cannot protect civil rights by attacking human rights. We cannot secure justice by abandoning the rule of law. We cannot achieve freedom by inflicting injustice.

We have no illusions that a solution lies somewhere over the rainbow. We know the path of progress is long and stoney. We do not seek to mislead people by promises of instant solutions. We do not hide from our responsibilities by hiding behind unrealistic and uncompromising demands. We seek to help people not to use them. We seek to allay fears, not to play to them. We seek to ease tensions, not to exacerbate them. We try only to solve problems, not exploit them.

In the political life of Northern Ireland, this has involved great difficulties and pressures. But in the words of our friend Senator Kennedy:

"We have neither bent with the wind nor broken with the waves".

We are only fifteen years old. During these years we have stood up for the rights and needs of our people against all attacks, whether from bombs or bullets, bigots or budgets,

gunmen or government and from those who rule or those who ruin. In doing so we have sought to preserve, not just their quality of life but their dignity. Whatever the challenges that lie ahead, whatever the outcome of the next few years, we shall not change.