

Speech by John Hume MP
SDLP Youth Conference
St Columb's Park House
25th February 2005

I am very pleased to be speaking to the SDLP Youth conference and to welcome you to Derry. Your generation is the generation that will be building the new Ireland and your approach to doing so will be based on the principles for which the SDLP has consistently campaigned since its foundation. Given that our problem has not changed, neither has the SDLP's approach to solving it and as the record shows the SDLP has been the party that has been totally consistent in its approach.

The SDLP has consistently opposed violence. We have consistently repeated that it is the people of Ireland that are divided, not the territory and therefore violence had no role to play, it deepened the divisions of the people and made the problem more difficult to solve, in addition to taking many human lives.

The SDLP has consistently proposed power sharing in Northern Ireland and a North-South Council of Ireland. SDLP were to the forefront in the Sunningdale agreement 30 years ago. It was brought down by loyalist paramilitaries. The SDLP as I have said and as the people know have consistently proposed a power sharing government and a North-South Council of Ireland, which are central proposals of the Good Friday Agreement.

The very first poster of the SDLP in its very first election was "An agreed Ireland" and in our early documents and articles the titled summary of our policy was "Towards a New Ireland".

Now that for the first time in history the people of Ireland as a whole have clearly declared as to how they wish to live together by overwhelmingly voting for the Good Friday Agreement, it is therefore the duty of all true democrats to implement the will of the people and therefore to implement all aspects of the Good Friday Agreement.

In doing so they will be building a new Ireland and it is your generation that will be doing so. Once the institutions of the Good Friday Agreement are in place, the representatives of all sections of our community will be working together to build a new society and as they do so, spilling their sweat and not their blood, they will breakdown the barriers of distrust of centuries, the real border in Ireland, which is not a line in a map but is in the minds and hearts of people will be eroded and a new Ireland will evolve based on agreement and a respect for Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter and with the support of Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter.

Given that your generation are also living in a much smaller world, a world in which British, German, French, Italian, Spanish and of course Irish, are all working together to build a new Europe, leaving the terrible conflicts and hatreds of the past behind, Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter should have no difficulty in doing the same thing in a New Ireland. That is the challenge to your generation. I have no doubt that you will succeed.