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STATEMENT BY HMA DUBLIN TO OIREACHTAS SUB-COMMITTEE ON NORTHERN
IRELAND

HMA Dublin is due to appear before the Oireachtas Sub-Committee on Northern Ireland this Wednesday. The statement he intends to make, which was prepared in consultation with NIO officials and the FCO, is attached below. I would be grateful for the Minister's approval, in the Secretary of State's absence, of the text.

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SILMAIL/EM/23359

**DRAFT STATEMENT BY HM AMBASSADOR TO OIREACHTAS SUB-COMMITTEE ON
NORTHERN IRELAND**

Mr Chairman,

I am grateful for your invitation to set out before your Committee something of the United Kingdom Government's aims, policies and programmes in Northern Ireland. They can be summarized in just three words: peace, stability and prosperity.

Our two Governments share many common interests, not least in the long-term peace, stability and prosperity of the island of Ireland. We welcome the constructive interest taken in the affairs of Northern Ireland by the Irish Government, by the Oireachtas and by many people in the Republic. In the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985 we recognised the importance and legitimacy of that interest. The Agreement has provided a framework through which the British and the Irish Governments have been able to develop a new relationship based on understanding, trust and mutual respect. It remains a cornerstone of our relationship.

The pattern of understanding established in 1985 has been enhanced by the Downing Street Declaration of 15 December 1993, which is, and will remain, a basic document for British policy. Even on the most difficult and sensitive issues of Northern Ireland's constitutional status the policies of both Governments are now based on shared principles.

The Declaration is an important, lasting assertion of constitutional principles and political realities. It embodies three vital principles: consent freely given, self-determination and the renunciation of violence. It is also a starting point for peace, providing the opportunity for Sinn Fein to take part in the political dialogue once they renounce violence for good. We hope that, despite the disappointment of last week's brief ceasefire, they will seize this opportunity.

The Declaration is an essentially democratic document, which ranges the two governments shoulder to shoulder together for consent and democracy and against violence and coercion. It is also a balanced document, addressing the interest and aspiration of both communities and threatening neither. As such it cannot be up for renegotiation or interpretation.

It reasserts that the British Government has no selfish strategic or economic interest in Northern Ireland. It also says that our primary interest is to seek peace, stability and reconciliation established by agreement between all the people who live on the island of Ireland. The British Government accepts that the key to peace is agreement between the people living on the island of Ireland, North and South respectively. We have committed ourselves to work with the Irish Government to achieve such an agreement, based on full respect for the rights and identities of both traditions in Northern Ireland.

The outcome cannot be pre-determined, and no outcome is ruled out. It could include agreed structures for the island as a whole. It could include a united Ireland, were that the democratic wish of a greater number of the people of Northern Ireland. That is a matter for them and for the people of the Republic to determine respectively without external impediment. The British Government has already undertaken to introduce and support in Parliament the legislation necessary to give effect to that wish.

On the other hand, the Declaration restates the constitutional guarantee: the British Government will uphold the democratic wish of a greater number of the people of Northern Ireland on the issue of whether they prefer to support the Union or a sovereign united Ireland. The Declaration makes it clear that the consent of the people of Northern Ireland on this point is decisive. It would be wrong, as well as fruitless, to attempt to impose a united Ireland in the absence of the freely given consent of a majority of the people in Northern Ireland.

On the issue of self-determination - this too is based on consent and reflects the political realities and democratic principles - the Declaration again makes British views clear: the British Government agrees that it is for the people of the island of Ireland alone, by agreement between the two parts respectively, to exercise their right of self-determination on the basis of consent, freely and concurrently given, North and South, to bring about a united Ireland, if that is their wish.

Self-determination is all about respecting and accommodating the wishes of people without external pressure being brought to bear. Because the British Government believes that it is for the people of the island of Ireland alone to determine their future, they have consistently and on principle declined to adopt the role of persuaders for any particular outcome. Nevertheless, we have agreed to work with the Irish Government and the Northern Ireland constitutional parties to achieve agreement among all the people who inhabit the island of Ireland. Such an agreement would embrace the totality of relationships, in order to bring about peace, stability and reconciliation.

To this end it remains our objective to return to multilateral talks involving the two Governments and the main constitutional parties at the appropriate point.

We regret that the talks process, begun in 1991, has not made better progress. But the logic of the three stranded process still holds. We stand by the rules agreed in March 1991, including that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed, but it will be for the parties in any new talks to decide on that point. We believe an internal settlement on its own would not work because it would not command widespread acceptance across both parts of the community. That remains essential.

Since September 1993 private bilateral discussions have taken place with three of the four main constitutional parties. Both British and Irish Governments are continuing their contacts. At

the last Inter-Governmental Conference on 10 March, Ministers mandated further intensive work on a framework to carry the Talks process forward. The aim is to establish areas of common agreement, to explore areas of continuing concern and to try to identify a degree of flexibility which may be needed on all sides to resolve problems.

It is too early to say what will emerge from our exploratory discussions. It would not be helpful to prospects for success to go into any detail in what I say about this today and I have been given no mandate to do so. But no artificial time limits have been set and any further dialogue need not be in the same format as before, provided a new format is agreed by all concerned: talks are a means to an end and not an end in themselves.

We will work to bring about new talks. We will continue our close relationship with the Irish Government on the basis of the 1985 Agreement and the Joint Declaration. We will continue to work and pray for a cessation of violence. Success in all this lies not in our hands alone. But at the same time we will continue to seek to make Northern Ireland a better place to live in, for everyone, and to provide fair and effective government for all.

As successive British Governments have recognised, in Northern Ireland political, security, social and economic problems are all intimately and inseparably interconnected. The Government is tackling these problems in a series of complementary and mutually reinforcing policies, to bring about a pluralistic society offering parity of esteem to both traditions. We have a duty to bring an end to terrorism and to maintain law and order. We wish to establish a prosperous society free of the discrimination of the past: though much has been done, some things remain to be done. And we need to find ways to return democratic accountability to Northern Ireland and diminish the democratic deficit.

Over the past 25 years terrorist violence has claimed over 3,000 lives, destroyed countless homes, businesses and jobs, and poisoned the life of the community. As long as violence continues it will be met with a firm and resolute response. The Government remains committed to the principle that terrorist crime, like other forms of crime, should be dealt with by the vigorous and impartial enforcement of the criminal law. The Royal Ulster Constabulary will continue to take every step practicable to protect the community as a whole from terrorist attacks from whatever source and wherever necessary they will continue to be able to call on the support of the armed forces to carry out their duties.

It is appropriate that I should put on record today the British Government's deep appreciation for the excellent cooperation on security matters both across the border and with the authorities in Britain, not least for the recent very successful Garda operations that have led to the recovery of terrorist weapon stocks. Effective cooperation is of very great importance in countering terrorist operations.

Where terrorist crimes are committed, the police will continue to mount thorough, professional investigations aimed at securing the evidence necessary to identify the perpetrators and to pursue a successful prosecution. Where suspected offenders attempt to escape justice by fleeing the jurisdiction we will continue to seek their extradition. We warmly welcome in this regard the Extradition (Amendment) Bill recently brought forward by the Irish Government.

However, success in countering terrorism requires more than determination and professionalism: it requires that the police, and the armed forces, should enjoy the confidence and support of the whole community. This crucial consideration is one to which the UK Government and the security forces themselves have paid great attention. It is worthwhile bearing in mind that while the security forces in Northern Ireland forestall by our reckoning

a high proportion of the attempted attacks, last year not one of the 84 people who died as a result of the troubles did so at the hands of the security forces.

Perhaps I can mention three other developments:

- We have introduced Codes of Practice governing the detention, questioning, treatment and identification of terrorist suspects.

- We have appointed Mr David Hewitt as Independent Assessor of Military Complaints Procedures. His task is to ensure that the procedures for investigating non-criminal complaints against soldiers are as effective as possible, and that they have been followed rigorously in individual cases.

- And we have appointed Sir Louis Blom-Cooper, a distinguished lawyer, as Independent Commissioner for the Holding Centres with authority to make unannounced visits to the centres where terrorist suspects are detained under the emergency legislation. His first annual report has already been published.

There is solid evidence that these measures have begun to work. Non-criminal complaints against the army were down 25% last year and an opinion poll has suggested that only 27% of Catholics are dissatisfied with the performance of the police.

But there is certainly no complacency, nor room for it. The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has recently published for consultation his proposals for a new policing structure which he hopes will increase the accountability of the police to the community at the very highest level.

Of course, other measures are also necessary to heal the scars in the community. The British Government recognises that if mutual understanding, tolerance and respect are to flourish, it is not only a matter for individuals. Government must give a strong lead with a clear and unimpeachable commitment to fairness at the centre. With this in mind the Government is committed to parity

of esteem for the cultures and identities of both the main sections of Northern Ireland's community. For example, the Government has recognised and respected the special significance of the Irish language for many in Northern Ireland and encourages interest in it. In 1993/4 the state provided well over £1.5 million for Irish language teaching and other programmes.

Education for Mutual Understanding is a compulsory cross-curricular theme for all children from 4 to 16, and many schools have taken up that challenge by developing their own cross-community links. The Department of Education for Northern Ireland encourages and facilitates the development of integrated education - while respecting parental choice. The next generation will be more conscious of the rich heritage of the cultural diversity in Northern Ireland and will, we hope, respect and appreciate it.

The Government has taken steps to address a number of other long-standing grievances. Legislation will shortly be introduced to make it possible for District Councils to erect street signs in Irish as well as English where that is the local wish. They have reached an agreement with the Catholic Church about the management of Catholic Maintained schools: the Trustees will no longer be required to raise 15% of the cost of capital projects.

Fair employment remains a major concern for the Government. The strongest anti-discrimination laws in Europe provides for comprehensive monitoring of workforces by a Fair Employment Commission with strong legal and economic sanctions against defaulting employers. Affirmative action is also being encouraged. While unemployment continues to fall particularly heavily on Catholic men, the latest data from the Fair Employment Commission indicate that the Catholic share of the workforce is steadily increasing. It will increase much faster if we can create more new jobs, which is what the Government is determined to do. Unemployment fell by 6% over the last year and looks set to fall even further.

The economy is growing more rapidly than in other parts of the

United Kingdom. Northern Ireland has an increasingly favourable reputation as a successful and profitable manufacturing base. In 1992/3 the Northern Ireland Industrial Development Board brought to Northern Ireland almost 2,000 new jobs and £170 million of industrial investment. In the financial year that has just ended they have exceeded those levels. Over the past 5 years overseas companies have invested over £1 billion in Northern Ireland. The traditional Irish skills and talents that have contributed so much to the success of so many Northern Ireland enterprises are being put to good use by companies from continental Europe, Asia and North America who now employ a significant proportion of Northern Ireland's manufacturing workforce.

Terrorism, by selecting economic targets, seeks to discourage investment and weaken the economy. By increasing unemployment it looks to provide a recruiting ground for terrorists. The converse applies: the creation of employment can materially assist with the pursuit of peace.

I began by summarising British policy in the words peace, stability and prosperity. In the Northern Ireland context these are not just notions or ideals, but a framework for action. In working to realise them we are hindered, above all, by a terrorist campaign which disrupts political progress; which destroys lives, property and prosperity; and which creates new social wounds and keeps old wounds open. The British Government is convinced that the vast majority in these islands want the destruction to stop, so that we can together tackle the real problems: how to live side by side, with our own beliefs and loyalties, in peace, stability and prosperity. The key lies in the hands of the Provisional IRA, who alas continue to evade and prevaricate. If Sinn Fein wish to enter the democratic process and play a constructive rather than a destructive role, to build rather than destroy, the route has been spelled out by both Governments publicly and unambiguously. We hope they take it. But that is their decision, not ours.