

Meeting with Women
5199/95

WELCOME.

THANK YOU ALL FOR TAKING TIME OUT OF YOUR BUSY SCHEDULES TO COME ALONG TO THIS MEETING TONIGHT.

IN MY INVITATION TO YOU I SAID THAT I HOPE THESE MEETINGS WILL ALLOW ME TO HEAR THE VIEWS AND CONCERNS WHICH THE WOMEN OF NORTHERN IRELAND HAVE ABOUT THEIR ROLE IN THE FUTURE OF NORTHERN IRELAND.

THIS MEETING IS THEREFORE YOUR OPPORTUNITY TO EXPRESS YOUR CONCERNS ON THE ISSUES WHICH YOU WANT GOVERNMENT TO HEAR ABOUT AND TO CONSIDER. IT IS ALSO A CHANCE FOR ME TO HEAR WHAT IS HAPPENING IN YOUR AREA. I THEREFORE DO NOT INTEND TO DO ALL THE TALKING TONIGHT BUT INSTEAD TO LISTEN TO WHAT YOU HAVE TO SAY.

I DO, HOWEVER, THINK IT MIGHT BE USEFUL IF AT THE OUTSET OF OUR DISCUSSION I SHARE WITH YOU WHAT I HOPE THESE MEETINGS CAN ACHIEVE.

1.

BECAUSE OF THE CEASEFIRES, NORTHERN IRELAND IS AT A CROSSROADS AND THERE IS CURRENTLY A LOT OF DISCUSSION GOING ON ABOUT THE FUTURE OF THE PROVINCE. I WANT TO ENSURE THAT WOMEN HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO VOICE THEIR CONCERNS. FOR EXAMPLE, I WOULD LIKE TO HEAR YOUR VIEWS ON A NUMBER OF ISSUES WHICH IMPACT ON WOMEN, SUCH AS:

- HOW CAN WE GIVE YOU A GREATER SAY IN OUR SOCIETY?
- WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS THAT PREVENT YOU FROM PLAYING A BIGGER PART IN THE ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL LIFE OF NORTHERN IRELAND.
- WHAT SHOULD BE DONE TO TACKLE THESE?
- WHAT ARE THE PARTICULAR ISSUES OF CONCERN TO YOU AND YOUR FRIENDS? WHAT MORE DO YOU THINK NEEDS TO BE DONE AND WHO SHOULD DO IT?

THESE ARE THE VERY BROAD SORTS OF ISSUES WHICH I WOULD LIKE YOU TO CONSIDER. WHAT I HOPE YOU CAN DO HERE TONIGHT IS TO GIVE ME YOUR THOUGHTS ON WHAT YOU THINK NEEDS TO BE DONE ON THESE ISSUES OR ANY OTHERS WHICH YOU THINK ALSO NEED TO BE CONSIDERED. MANY ISSUES WILL INVOLVE GOVERNMENT. AND I AM NOT GOING TO DUCK WHAT ARE PROPERLY GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSIBILITIES. BUT GOVERNMENT CAN ONLY BE EFFECTIVE IN CERTAIN AREAS. OFTEN IT IS THE VOLUNTARY AND THE PRIVATE SECTORS WHICH ARE BETTER PLACED TO ACT, WITH OR WITHOUT GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT. I WANT TO HEAR YOUR VIEWS ON WHAT THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR AND BUSINESSES CAN DO AS WELL.

FINALLY, I CAN'T GUARANTEE THAT ALL OF YOUR VIEWS WILL BE ACTED ON BUT I CAN PROMISE THEY WILL BE SERIOUSLY CONSIDERED. I WILL ALSO ENSURE THAT ANY ISSUES RAISED WHICH FALL OUTSIDE OF MY DIRECT RESPONSIBILITY OF AGRICULTURE AND THE ECONOMY WILL BE FED BACK TO DEPARTMENTS CONCERNED.

I WILL TRY TO ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS YOU MIGHT HAVE
TONIGHT, OR PROMISE TO GET AN ANSWER TO YOU, BUT
PRIMARILY TONIGHT IS ABOUT YOU EXPRESSING YOUR OPINIONS.
IT IS YOUR OPPORTUNITY TO TELL ME WHAT YOU WANT. I AM
HERE TO LISTEN.