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Speech by the Taoiseach, Mr. John Bruton, T.D.,
on the occasion of the publication of the Joint Framework Document
Dail Eireann, 22 February, 1995 at 4.00 pm

A Cheann Comhairle,

As the House will be aware, earlier today in Belfast, the British Prime Minister and I together launched a Joint Framework Document. The document is a shared understanding between the British and Irish Governments and its purpose is to assist discussion and negotiation involving the Northern Ireland political parties. Copies of the document have been circulated to all members.

At the outset, I wish to put on record my thanks and appreciation to the Tánaiste and his Departmental staff who have negotiated with considerable skill, patience and tenacity to achieve this outcome. It is also appropriate that I pay tribute to my predecessor as Taoiseach, Deputy Albert Reynolds, and his advisors, without whose vision and considerable courage, the peace process, of which this document is an integral part, would not have been possible.

May I again emphasise what this document is: it is a shared understanding between the two governments to assist discussion and negotiation involving the Northern Ireland political parties. Deputies will recall that in 1992, talks involving Northern Ireland political parties came to a halt. It was suggested

then that it would be helpful if both governments were to set out their shared view on the broad lines of a possible political accommodation. It was felt that this might give impetus and direction to the process of negotiation.

In response to this suggestion, the British and Irish governments began a painstaking and detailed exercise which has led to the publication to-day of the Joint Framework Document. The Document also draws on the Downing Street Declaration of 15 December, 1993. In a sense, the publication of to-day's document brings together two separate but parallel exercises - the talks process and the peace process are now, formally, one process.

Lasting peace and stability on this island requires that three sets of relationships be addressed: the relationship between the two communities in Northern Ireland, the relationship between both parts of this island, and the relationship between the sovereign governments in Dublin and London.

In the documents published today, the two Governments have set out their shared view of the points that need to be met if the three relationships are to be satisfactorily accommodated.

May I briefly say what the Framework document is not. It is not a prescription for an unpalatable dose of medicine. It is not a blue print rigidly to be imposed on the people of Northern Ireland. It is not a cage within which their political leaders will have their dialogue confined. It is not an Irish nationalist agenda. It is not a British agenda. What is it? It is a view, shared by two governments, as to what might most usefully be done to deal with the three, fraught and difficult, sets of relationships.

It represents an assessment by the two governments of what we think might be an agreed outcome from future talks involving the governments and the Northern Ireland political parties. We believe we have got it right. We are open to persuasion by anyone who believes otherwise.

It is now a matter for the people of Northern Ireland, and also for the people in this part of Ireland, and in Britain to study the document, and I recommend that they do so in a constructive and calm way.

No party will regard this document as meeting all their requirements and aspirations. The document represents balance and compromise. If its main elements become the basis for new institutions and political arrangements, I believe that they will ultimately command the widespread support necessary to ensure a fair and effective arrangement for the three sets of relationships to which I have referred.

This document is the contribution of two governments together. It aims at balance between aspirations that are, if put within a traditional absolutist and territorial matrix, basically irreconcilable. But the document does more than just attempt to balance two irreconcilable aspirations. It is the beginning of work towards a wholly new form of expression of traditional aspirations, focusing on individuals and communities rather than on territory. By expressing aspirations in this new way, we hope that the two otherwise irreconcilable sets of aspirations can, in fact, be reconciled.

The Governments will welcome the detailed papers and contributions of political parties, especially in Northern Ireland. We challenge them to seek the same balance, the same rethinking, and the same radical reconciliation that we have sought in our proposals. Let Nationalist parties show how their proposals accommodate Unionist aspirations. Let Unionist parties show how their proposals accommodate Nationalist aspirations. Let both recognise the reality of divisions and the need to bridge them creatively. That is the challenge to both of them. Don't just recite your own fears and aspirations. Tell us how the fear of the other community can be assuaged. Tell us how the other community's aspirations can be given legitimate expression.

And now let me turn to the document itself.

The document is founded on four guiding principles:

- (i) the principle of self-determination as set out in the December, 1993 Downing Street Joint Declaration;
- (ii) the principle that the consent of the governed is an essential ingredient for stability in any political arrangement;
- (iii) the principle that agreement must be pursued and established by exclusively democratic peaceful means without resort to violence or coercion;
- (iv) and, finally, the principle that any new political arrangements must be based on full respect for, and protection of the expression of, the rights

and identities of both traditions in Ireland and, must in an even handed way, afford both communities in Northern Ireland parity of esteem, including equality of opportunity.

The document seeks to build such a framework on four main pillars:

- Structures within Northern Ireland;
- North/South institutions;
- East/West structures;
- Constitutional issues.

The Joint Framework Document commends direct dialogue with the relevant political parties in Northern Ireland to develop new internal political structures. The dialogue is one for the political parties there. The governments confirm that cross-community agreement is an essential requirement for the establishment and successful operation of such structures. While the principles and overall context for such new structures are a recognised concern of both Governments, the structures themselves should be negotiated in direct dialogue involving the relevant political parties in Northern Ireland, who will have to operate them. In a separate document published today, the British Government has unilaterally set out its ideas for structures in Northern Ireland. Neither my predecessor or I felt it appropriate to become involved in the detail of this Document and I do not propose to comment on it.

Moving then to the second pillar, the North/South institutions. We envisage that new institutions should be created to cater adequately for present and future political, social and economic inter-connections on the island of Ireland

enabling representatives of the main traditions North and South to enter agreed, dynamic, new, co-operative and constructive relationships.

These institutions should include a North/South body involving Heads of Departments on both sides, duly established and maintained by legislation in both sovereign parliaments. This body would bring together Ministers representing the Irish Government and political heads of departments from the new democratic institutions in Northern Ireland. Its function would be to discharge or to oversee delegated executive, harmonising or consultative functions over a range of matters. In the first instance, the two Governments acting in agreement with the parties will designate these functions. Subsequently, the two administrations North and South may agree to further designations.

It is our intention that the functions for the proposed North/South body would be designated by the two Governments in agreement with the Northern Ireland parties. Our approach on this, as on all other elements in the Document, is based on the principle of consent. We wish to see a North/South body which will be flexible and dynamic. Its terms of reference, its legal status, and arrangements for its political, legal, administration and financial accountability will be established by legislation in both sovereign parliaments, but again only following the pursuit of agreement with the participants in the Northern Ireland talks process, and only following endorsement by the people of both parts of Ireland voting separately in referendums on the same day. In this process, emphasis will, of course, be placed on making sure that the arrangements are workable and useful. Everybody's views on this will be welcome.

Functions which might be designated to the North/South body would fall into three main categories: consultative, harmonising and executive. The range of functions that might be designated at the outset for executive level action would include sectors involving

- a natural or physical, cross-border or all-Ireland framework,
- EC programmes and initiatives,
- marketing and promotion activity abroad and
- culture and heritage.

Again I emphasise that no function whether executive, harmonising or consultative will be carried out without the agreement of the Northern Ireland representatives on the body. I would also like to make it clear that functions will be designated only where it makes practical common sense. I do not envisage a North/South body with an imposing headquarters. I do not envisage thousands of civil servants working out how all the people on this island might be brought together under some uniform arrangements. The North/South body that I envisage will consist of say, three Ministers from this Government and three Ministers from whatever administration emerges in Northern Ireland, sitting down together from time to time. They will be doing this without in any way diminishing the separate traditions and aspirations. The emphasis will be on practicality and workability.

The third pillar in the Joint Framework Document deals with East/West structures. Both Governments envisage a broadly based agreement which will maintain a standing Anglo-Irish Inter-Governmental Conference chaired by the designated the Irish Minister and by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

with a small supporting permanent secretariat. The Inter-Governmental Conference will have as its main objective the deepening of co-operation between the two Governments, and will provide a continuing institutional expression for the Irish Government's recognised concern and role in relation to Northern Ireland. It will:

- provide a forum for agreement on bi-lateral matters not covered by other specific arrangements and excluding matters for which responsibility is transferred to new political institutions in Northern Ireland;
- consider ways of enhancing community identification with policing in Northern Ireland;
- review the workings of the agreement and promote, support and underwrite the fair and effective operation of all its provisions and the new arrangements established under it;
- monitor those provisions and where necessary provide a forum for the resolution of disputes and
- provide a framework for consultation and co-ordination between both Governments and the new North/South institutions.

Let me now deal with the constitutional issues, the fourth and final pillar. The Irish and British Governments are prepared to address them as part of an overall accommodation.

In the case of my Government, I am prepared to introduce and support proposals for change in the Irish Constitution to implement the commitments in this Document and in the Downing Street Joint Declaration. I will return to this point in a moment. In the case of the British Government, their new approach for Northern Ireland, vesting the constitutional future in the people of Northern Ireland, will be enshrined in British constitutional legislation. This will embody the principles and commitments in the Joint Declaration, and in this Framework Document, either by an amendment of the Government of Ireland Act, 1920 or by its replacement by appropriate new legislation and appropriate new provisions entrenched by agreement.

For reasons which I explained here today, I do not propose at this stage to table details of proposed amendments to the constitution. More time is required for consultation and consideration. The detailed wording of the redrafting of the Constitution is properly a matter for the Government and the Oireachtas, not for negotiation with another government. What I can say is that the principles and immutable political commitments underlying the changes will be:

- to remove any jurisdictional or territorial claim of legal right over the territory of Northern Ireland contrary to the will of the people of Ireland
- and to provide that the creation of a sovereign united Ireland could therefore only occur, in circumstances where a majority of the people of Northern Ireland formally chose to be part of a united Ireland
- and that the existing birthright of everyone born in either jurisdiction in Ireland to be part as of right of the Irish nation would be maintained.

It should also be important to say to unionists that the document contains a recognition by both Governments of the legitimacy of whatever choice is freely exercised by a majority of the people of Northern Ireland with regard to its constitutional status, whether they prefer to continue to support the Union or to opt for a sovereign united Ireland.

In the Framework Document, both Governments also commit themselves to finding a means in their own jurisdictions to protect specified civil, political, social and cultural rights. Obviously, there will be widespread consultation with the relevant political parties. There might also be a covenant enshrining a dedication to mutual respect between the two traditions to the exclusively peaceful resolution of all the differences between them.

So much for the Document itself and for the background developments which lead to it. May I now make some concluding remarks.

The problems which this Document is attempting to deal with are deep rooted and of long standing. I will not attempt an historical analysis nor do I think it relevant to rehearse the wrongs, the grievances, and the injustices felt on all sides. Much pain has been inflicted, much damage has been done, much trust has been forfeited, and much sorrow has been caused. Those of us who share the island of Ireland have certainly not been enabled to realise our full potential. The tensions between the two communities in Northern Ireland, between the two parts of Ireland and between Britain and Ireland have diminished all of us.

Traditional political structures have not provided solutions to our problems. We must find new and imaginative structures which will provide security to both nationalists and unionists. Paper declarations can only go so far. As long as a significant section of people feel systematically alienated from the structures of government, no one will feel secure. Our proposals today are, I believe, balanced and should provide security for everyone. Security does not come from constitutions or statutes. It comes from knowing that your neighbour, of a different tradition, can feel that same loyalty to the State, and can identify with it on the same terms of equality and esteem, as you do. That's what we want for Northern Ireland.

As we embark on this new phase in our discussions, I am encouraged by a number of things. I am encouraged by the excellent and positive spirit in the Anglo-Irish relationship which has made possible the launching of this Joint Framework Document. I am encouraged that it was possible for my party and for this Government essentially to work with a document inherited from a Fianna Fáil led Government. I am encouraged by the cessation of violence in Northern Ireland and by the considerable discipline and skill which has been shown in maintaining that cessation on a daily basis.

I welcome the way in which Sinn Féin has embraced the political process and joined with other parties in working the political institutions to which they now have access. I think in particular of their role in the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation where they are making their mark. Senior figures in that party have demonstrated political courage and a sense of openness to new ideas.

But perhaps what should most encourage us this year, when we look back 50 years to the end of the Second World War, is that we can see that new and imaginative political institutions made possible the maintenance of peace, and the gradual reconciliation between European States, who had for generations engaged in war as a means of resolving disputes.

I hope that a similarly imaginative and courageous approach on the part of all the political elements on this island and in Britain would achieve the same degree of trust and co-operation. My Government and I are ready to play our part. A successful settlement in Northern Ireland, reconciling different loyalties within the one land area, can provide an Irish and British model for resolving many similar conflicts in the emerging states of central and eastern Europe.

In conclusion, I ask only that all other parties approach the Document, published in Belfast today, in a constructive and calm way. Read it. Think about it. Give us your ideas. But above all, give us your commitment, your faith in the future.