



## NORTHERN IRELAND Information Service

6 JULY 1997

### DRUNCREE

Commenting on the decision made earlier today in respect of the Druncree church parade by the Chief Constable under Article 4 of the Public Order Order 1987, the Rt Hon Dr Mo Mowlam, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, said:

"This is a sad day for all of us. Many will be angered by what has occurred but I appeal to them and to all with influence in their communities to exercise restraint. Northern Ireland has seen far too many tragedies. Peace and the preservation of life in the end matters most of all.

The right to peaceful assembly - the right to march - is a basic right. But all rights carry responsibilities. They should be exercised with respect for the rights and freedoms of others.

In this case a decision, which is for the Chief Constable to make, has had to be taken to preserve public safety. I fully support the action the Chief Constable has had to take but at the same time this is an outcome that I regret and that neither he nor I wanted.

What you and the vast majority of people in Northern Ireland wanted was a sensible accommodation. I have done my utmost to achieve that as has the Chief Constable. But where there is intransigence on both sides that becomes impossible. And that is what I have met.

Let me be quite clear. My approach involves setting up new and better arrangements for dealing with these disputes for future years. I very much regret that the previous Government did not take the opportunity it had to put in place improved arrangements for this summer.

We will bring forward new legislation on parades later this year. Most people accept that the current way of dealing with these disputes is not adequate. The independent report from Dr North and his colleagues will provide the basis for our new approach.

Conditions have been set for the parade this year. If these are not fulfilled to the letter that is clearly something the Parades Commission will want to take into account in the future.

The judgement of the Chief Constable was that the public safety of all people in Northern Ireland is better protected by this decision. I respect and support his judgement. The law must be upheld but I want to make clear that the way ahead for the future is a new arrangement designed to ensure that the pain of these events can be put behind us for good.

I know many in the Nationalist community will be angered by this decision. It has been dictated by circumstances. I would have preferred it otherwise. Nevertheless I appeal to all in the Nationalist

come to understand that overall public safety across Northern Ireland has to be the Chief Constable's main concern. Your voice is not ignored. I understand your feelings and I will address them in legislating on this issue. I am only sorry that option was not open to me this summer."

The full text of the statement issued by the Secretary of State is attached.



across Northern Ireland - some twenty meetings in the last six weeks alone. Many of those meetings have been with members of the Portadown Orange Lodge and the Garvaghy Road Residents Association.

I am sorry to say that my efforts, along with those of many others, have not borne fruit. Those whom I have met are sincere in their beliefs and loyal to their communities. I believe it is this very sincerity and loyalty that held them back from reaching an accommodation of the kind I and others have sought.

I have no doubt that such an accommodation is the desired outcome of the vast majority of people in Northern Ireland and throughout these islands.

The Chief Constable of the RUC has specific responsibilities in respect of parades, as set out in the 1987 Public Order Order. Under Article Four of the Order he is entitled to specify conditions under which a parade is to take place. His decision must be guided by the likely outcome of a parade, with or without conditions, in terms of serious public disorder and other consequences. Through a scrupulous process of weighing these factors and applying the law, he has decided that the Drumcree parade should proceed subject to the conditions he has set out. If those conditions are not fulfilled to the letter that is clearly something the Parades Commission will want to take into account in the future.

This decision is not an accommodation. Where there is intransigence on both sides, that cannot be achieved. But the Chief Constable's decision, which is his to make, has full authority. It is the rule of law. I fully support the action the Chief Constable has had to take but at the same time this is an outcome that I regret and that neither he nor I want.

I expect everyone in Northern Ireland to respect the rule of law. Civilised societies are nothing without it. They are nothing either unless basic principles of fairness and justice are upheld. These are at the heart of this Government's approach and will remain there.

Let me be quite clear. I never wanted a position where there was a need for a imposed decision. Like the vast majority of people here, I wanted to see a local accommodation. I have done my absolute utmost to achieve that accommodation, through the Proximity Talks, through the series of meetings I and John Steele have held, and through many other initiatives. My approach for the future will continue in the same way.

My approach also involves setting up new and better arrangements for dealing with these disputes for future years. I very much regret that the previous Government did not take the opportunity it had to put in place improved arrangements for this summer.

We will bring forward new legislation on parades later this year. Most people accept that the current way of dealing with these disputes is not adequate. The independent report from Dr North and his colleagues will provide the basis for our new approach.

In setting our proposals we will take into account the fears and sensitivities which these issues arouse on all sides. Our proposals will be subject to the fullest possible scrutiny by Parliament. We shall be ensuring that, when legislation is introduced later this year, it will benefit fully from the experience of this marching season, and the views of all those involved, to achieve any enhancements which are possible to increase the chances of local accommodation and the workability of new arrangements. That is the way ahead for the future.

I remain convinced that, had these mechanisms been in place this year, they would have made an important contribution. I am grateful to Alister Graham and his team for their work this year, although I would stress they did not have a remit to engage in the decision making process. And they have had no direct influence on the decision which has, quite properly, been taken by the Chief Constable.

Last summer Northern Ireland witnessed a degree of public disorder which left a mark of shame on society here. It damaged beyond measure the image of this community in the eyes of the world. All the people of Northern Ireland have suffered as a consequence.

To anyone who may be thinking of revisiting that tragedy on their friends, their neighbours, their workmates, and their community let me say this.

Think before you act. Think about the families whose lives you might threaten, whose hopes you will dash, whose chances of a decent job, a decent home, a decent future you will diminish. No one is challenging the dignity and worth of the nationalist identity. Your voice is heard, and we will continue to listen - always. You have my word on that.