

REMARKS BY SENATOR GEORGE J MITCHELL

YOUTH COUNCIL FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

BELFAST, NORTHERN IRELAND

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It's a pleasure to participate in this conference. I commend the Youth Council for Northern Ireland for putting on this conference and for its many activities on behalf of the young people of Northern Ireland.

I've been involved in Northern Ireland for two and a half years. I've travelled widely here, met and talked with many people. Like most visitors, I've come to admire and like the people of Northern Ireland. There is tremendous energy, intelligence and productivity here.

I hope that as many of you young people as possible will stay in Northern Ireland and work to build a better society here. This community needs your energy, your effort, and, most of all, your commitment to peace and reconciliation.

What's needed to unleash the full potential of Northern Ireland is political stability. I know that for many of you, who've lived almost your entire lives in a climate of anxiety, hostility and violence, peace may seem a distant dream.

But I'm convinced that it's attainable, not in the distant future, but here and now. Of course it will be difficult. There are many obstacles.

But the one powerful factor that can override all the obstacles and difficulties is that the overwhelming majority of the people of Northern Ireland want peace, political stability and reconciliation.

Of course they have differences. As you know better than I do, the differences are many, the mistrust is deep. But people with differences need not kill and maim each other. People who mistrust others can find ways to work together to reduce that mistrust.

Trying to solve the political problems of Northern Ireland by violence can't succeed. It's morally wrong. The only way forward is through meaningful, inclusive, democratic dialogue. That way can succeed, if there's personal courage and political wisdom.

Men and women of courage don't use guns to try to solve political problems. Men and women of courage dare to compete in the arena of democracy, where the weapons are logic, common sense and fairness.

Men and women of wisdom don't see only one side of an issue, they don't arouse fears within their own community. Men and women of wisdom see both sides of the issue, and appeal to the hopes and aspirations of both communities, even while protecting the rights of their own community.

It is men and women of courage and wisdom who will bring to the people of Northern Ireland what people the world over want. I've travelled throughout the world, and my most lasting impression is the universal nature of the aspirations of people.

Whatever their race, or national heritage, or color, or religion, or class, people the world over want freedom and opportunity and equal justice; they want a chance to get a good job, to live in a decent home, to help their children get a good education and a good start in life; all in a safe and secure environment.

Two weeks ago my wife gave birth to my second child, my first son. Moments after his birth I held him in my arms. I gave a prayer of thanks, and then I wondered what kind of life he will have in the America of the twenty-first century. Will he have those things I mentioned a few minutes ago: good health, a good education, a decent start in life; will he be safe and secure? Will he be able to go as high and as far as his talent and willingness to work will take him? These are the hopes and dreams of parents everywhere.

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The greatest reward in your lives will come not from leisure, not from idleness, not from self-indulgence, but rather from striving with all your physical and spiritual might for a worthwhile objective. A Northern Ireland of peace and prosperity is a worthwhile objective.

Each of you can help achieve it, not just for yourselves, but also for the sixty-one babies who are two weeks old today.

They begin their lives in total innocence. Let us - all of us - work to build the kind of society in Northern Ireland that will enable them to live each day of their lives not in mistrust and hatred, but rather in peace and reconciliation.