

We wish to make it clear that at these talks, the UUP remains four square for the Union, because the Union offers the best future for all our people whether Unionist, Nationalist or otherwise. The Union is not up for negotiation - it is this reality with which Nationalists and the Irish Government must come to terms. The Union offers all our people the best prospect of peace and fair play because the Union, links us all to a genuinely plural, liberal, democratic state capable of accommodating social, cultural and religious diversity. The Union does not exist to exalt one community over another or to sustain a religious ascendancy. The Union is not a sectarian ideal and such a union would not be worthy of preservation. The Union clearly remains our best guarantee of economic and social well being.

On May 16 1997, the Prime Minister made his first official visit outside London, to Northern Ireland. During his keynote speech in Belfast, Mr Blair underlined his commitment to Northern Ireland and the consent principle stating ,

*'I am committed to Northern Ireland. I am committed to the principle of consent. Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom, alongside England, Scotland and Wales. The Union binds the four parts of the United Kingdom together. I believe in the United Kingdom. I value the Union.'*

He later stated in a *Newsletter* article of September 13 1997, in a clear reference to Strand Two talks that he wishes to see in a settlement,

*'..mutually beneficial agreed North-South arrangements in the context of a broader based agreement addressing the totality of relationships within these islands.'*

Our aim is to fashion a settlement firmly within the Union. Based on the fundamental principle of consent, we want to see a settlement, not a temporary transitional arrangement, which recognises Northern Ireland's position as part of the United Kingdom, and addresses sensible, agreed, and mutually beneficial arrangements. The fundamental issue of the democratic rights of the people of Northern Ireland and their right to determine their destiny, is not an issue for negotiation or compromise.