

Government Statement concerning the Garvaghy Road Situation

The Government are gravely concerned at the events on the Garvaghy Road today. The abrupt reversal of the decision about the route of the Orange parade is regretted. It runs counter to the previously agreed approaches by both Governments to accord parity of esteem to both the nationalist and unionist communities. We have consistently maintained that the right to march must be exercised with due regard for the rights of local communities to enjoy protection against unwanted marches, and that marches should not take place in an area or along a route where they are not welcome.

The Government have been in close touch with events in Northern Ireland over the past week in particular, in the hope that the potential confrontations of the marching season could be defused.

We were aware of and supported the efforts being made at the local level and with assistance from Church leaders to find an acceptable conclusion to the Garvaghy Road situation. We are not aware of a reason why this dialogue was not pursued to the required acceptable outcome.

The Government are fully conscious of the anger which today's decision has caused to the nationalist community in Northern Ireland. We would appeal to all concerned to show the utmost restraint at this time. Restraint is the most effective of all arguments.

We have already conveyed to the British Government at the highest level our concern at this development, which we believe underlines more strongly than ever the need for a clear set of rules which once and for all reconciles the right to march with the no less important rights of communities to avoid hostile or unwelcome marches being visited on them.

Today's development will not deflect us from our efforts, though the multi-party talks and otherwise, to find a basis for an acceptable political settlement which will accommodate the wishes and aspirations of all.

11 July 1996