



**QUESTION NOS: 1 TO 5**

**DÁIL QUESTIONS** addressed to the Taoiseach  
by Deputies Bertie Ahern and Mary Harney  
for **ORAL ANSWER** on Tuesday, 12th November, 1996.

**QUESTION NO: 1**

To ask the Taoiseach if he regards the adherence to the Mitchell Principles upon entry into talks following a ceasefire as sufficient evidence of a party's serious commitment to exclusively political and democratic means.

- Bertie Ahern.

**QUESTION NO: 2**

To ask the Taoiseach if he will make a statement on the support the Government is giving to the efforts being made by Mr. John Hume to restore the IRA ceasefire.

- Bertie Ahern.

**QUESTION NO: 3**

To ask the Taoiseach the message, if any, he sent to President Clinton on his re-election.

- Bertie Ahern.

**QUESTION NO: 4**

To ask the Taoiseach if he will give details of the statement he made on the peace process in Mulhuddart, County Dublin, on Monday, 4 November 1996.

- Mary Harney.

**QUESTION NO: 5**

To ask the Taoiseach the preparatory work, if any, being undertaken in relation to the Government's commitments as outlined in the Downing Street Declaration, to examine any elements in the democratic life and organisation of the Irish State which could be represented as not being fully consistent with a modern democratic and pluralist society; and, if so, if he will report on such work.

- Mary Harney.

**REPLY.**

I propose to take Questions 1 to 5 together.

Intensive efforts have been made right through the period since last February to secure an unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire. The SDLP Leader, Mr. John Hume, has played and continues to play a very important and helpful role in this regard. In many respects, he is uniquely placed to convince Republicans of the inherently counterproductive nature of violence.

The Government have, of course, always been strongly supportive of John Hume's efforts. Owing to the particular sensitivities involved, Deputies will appreciate that it would be neither appropriate nor helpful for me to go into detail on this matter. I can, however, say that the Government and the SDLP leadership share the same broad aim - fully inclusive talks, taking place in an environment of peace, and leading to a political settlement founded on agreement and consent. We will both continue to do everything we can to bring that about.

**The criteria for participation in the multi-party talks were set out in the Joint Communiqué of 28 February and were subsequently restated in paragraphs 8 and 9 of the Ground Rules paper. They were in turn referred to in the**

**Northern Ireland (Entry to Negotiations) Act** which, for the British side, forms the legal basis of the multi-party talks. Those remain the entry conditions. In addition, it was also stated in both the Communiqué and the Ground Rules that all participants must make clear at the beginning of negotiations their total and absolute commitment to the principles of democracy and non-violence set out in the Report of the International Body. This was done last June by all the participants involved at present in the multi-party talks. It would also be required of Sinn Féin following an unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire.

The Government wish to see Sinn Féin participate in the negotiations. IRA actions since last February, however, have placed a question mark over the credibility of the Republican movement. That is why the two Governments have called for a restored ceasefire to be unequivocal. Sinn Féin and the IRA must be convincing in their commitment to exclusively peaceful and democratic methods.

The multi-party talks have the potential to provide a meaningful and inclusive process where all legitimate concerns can be addressed - in particular, once substantive three strand negotiations are launched. The ultimate purpose of these talks is the achievement of an agreed settlement to which both Nationalists and Unionists could give their support and allegiance. That requires that due recognition

and respect must be accorded to the allegiances, aspirations, identities and concerns of both communities. When substantive three-strand negotiations get under way, the Government will, of course, honour the relevant commitment in paragraph 6 of the Joint Declaration. That commitment, as Deputy Harney will be aware, is set in the context of representations being made by the Unionist political representatives in the course of political dialogue.

Without pre-empting such representations, much useful work on the broad theme of paragraph 6 has nevertheless been done by the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation and in particular, by the Sub-committee on Obstacles in the South to Reconciliation. The Sub-committee had been close to finalising its Report when it was decided to defer Forum meetings. The Government, of course, will take account of the deliberations of the Sub-committee, as appropriate, in the multi-party talks.

Regarding President Clinton's re-election, I sent him a short message of congratulations and thanked him for his continued interest in Ireland.

**ENDS**

(15/11/96 17:05:36)