



# Sinn Féin

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For immediate release

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## Removal of all preconditions necessary

Sinn Féin Chairperson Mitchel McLaughlin today spoke in Carrigaloe, Cobh, Co. Cork, at the unveiling of the restored monument to IRA Volunteer Danny O'Halloran, who was killed during the Civil War in October 1922.

Mr. McLaughlin took the opportunity to respond to recent statements from the Taoiseach. Mr. McLaughlin said:

"In the interests of peace-making we, in the Sinn Féin leadership, have been measured in responding to statements from the Taoiseach since last Monday. But given the nature of the political and personal insults which he has directed at the Sinn Féin leadership over the past ten days, I feel there is an obligation on me to respond as Chairperson of Sinn Féin.

"The type of offensive and gratuitous name-calling in which Mr. Bruton has engaged serves no constructive purpose. It is clearly a poor substitute for the political leadership required at this time. The Taoiseach's willingness to retreat into the old and failed agenda of vilification can only raise further questions about the depth of his commitment to this project since he came to office.

"Mr. Bruton's invective against Sinn Féin has more to do with apportioning blame for the collapse of the peace process than with rebuilding a new, viable and more credible process.

"The Sinn Féin leadership went to the limits of our ability to construct this peace process and, in a political vacuum created by British bad faith, to sustain the IRA cessation for eighteen months.

"Sinn Féin has fulfilled every commitment we made in the search for a lasting peace settlement. John Bruton knows this. He also knows that the failure of the British government to act on their commitment is the central problem and the cause of the collapse of the peace process. The British have consistently acted in bad faith and broken their commitments, whether it be their public commitment to initiate all party peace negotiations in the event of an IRA cessation or their promise that the Orange Order would not be allowed to walk over the rights of the people of the Garvaghy Road. John Bruton cannot simply scapegoat Sinn Féin in this situation. He knows how the British have behaved towards his government.

"While there is no doubt that British government bad faith was the single most negative factor in undermining the peace process, and confidence in it, it has to be said that at critical junctures Mr. Bruton made serious mistakes and misjudgements which contributed to the break-down of the peace process.

"When John Bruton refused to meet John Hume and Gerry Adams to discuss the serious impasse in the process last October, his refusal sent a shudder through nationalist and republican opinion, seriously undermining confidence in the Taoiseach and the peace process itself and indicated that unionist sensitivities would continue to be accommodated at the expense of nationalists.

"Even earlier when the bogus obstacle of decommissioning was first raised by the British government the Taoiseach chose to add his support to this demand, allowing it to bog the process down, and as it transpired fatally, for a further ten months. Decommissioning is an issue which needs to be resolved but it is only one of many, many issues. It cannot be allowed to block the dialogue which is necessary to its resolution and the resolution of all the other issues.

"During the Orange marching season Mr. Bruton's failure to represent or even to comprehend the plight of small nationalist communities renewed the sense of abandonment within that community in the north, particularly when he refused to send observers into these situations. Instead he berated the victim communities for the spontaneous protests which occurred after the British capitulation to the Orange Order on the Garvaghy Road.

"We all need to learn from the mistakes which were made over the past two years and to ensure that they are not repeated. Mr. Bruton must face up to his mistakes and misjudgments.

"I am therefore concerned at indications that, in response to unionist demands, new preconditions may be added to Sinn Féin's entry to dialogue. David Trimble is demanding these preconditions with the declared purpose of excluding Sinn Féin from negotiations. Clearly, the present difficulties can only be compounded if new preconditions and restrictions are introduced when what is clearly required is the removal of all preconditions and the development of an effective and credible negotiations process. The Irish government should not surrender a leadership role in the peace process for that of a referee in an external dispute. The north is part of the Irish national territory and the Taoiseach needs to uphold his responsibilities to all sections of the Irish nation and to individual Irish citizens in his approach to the search for a lasting settlement.

"The dialogue which created the Irish Peace Process required courage, imagination and a new approach on all sides, not least on the part of the then Taoiseach, Albert Reynolds, and the SDLP leader John Hume. It is also a fact that there would not have been a peace process without Sinn Féin.

"It is worth remembering that those who have retreated so readily into the old vitriol are those who were most negative and critical of our efforts at that time.

"The objective reality of recent history is that nationalist Ireland built an opportunity for peace, the IRA enhanced that opportunity and sustained this over eighteen months, yet at the end of that period the unionist leaderships had not moved one inch. In the eighteen months of the IRA cessation and in the eight months since, there has not been one word of negotiation. As many observers, including the Tanaiste Dick Spring, have pointed out you cannot persuade people that there is a political way forward and then present them with a political vacuum.

"The creation of new preconditions and restrictions on Sinn Féin's entry to talks can only increase the difficulties in developing a convincing argument that "a meaningful and inclusive process of negotiations is genuinely being offered." (as stated in the report of the International Body)

"What is clearly required is the removal of all preconditions and the development of an effective and credible negotiations process. This and the many other lessons of the last two years need to be learnt, not just so that a new IRA cessation can be secured, though this is obviously a central element, but most crucially so that a successful peace process is established which can finally resolve the conflict and deliver a just and lasting peace on this island." ENDS