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Taoiseach
The content here
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Adams stresses need for "credible and viable peace process"

Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams in a keynote speech to party activists in North Belfast today stressed the reasonableness of the Sinn Féin position which is for a credible and viable peace process.

Mr Adams pointed out that conflict can't be wished away and that we need collectively to create the conditions for peace.

He placed the onus for progress on Mr Major saying that Sinn Féin is prepared to go the extra mile for peace. Is Mr Major? The British Prime Minister must show that he would not treat a second IRA cessation as he did the last one.

The Sinn Féin President said the loyalist parties have shown more openness and imagination than the mainstream unionist leaderships but he urged vigilance and calm in light of loyalist threats of a return to the indiscriminate killing of innocent Catholics.

Mr Adams pointed to the success of 1994 and expressed Sinn Féin's willingness to meet any of the other parties and the two governments in an effort to find a way out of this crisis.

The challenge of peace is still there and Sinn Féin is wholly committed to pursuing that goal but the key to progress is held by John Major.

Full Text of Mr Adams speech

"8 months ago the peace process collapsed. The current situation is in deep crisis.

It would be nice if we could simply wish it all away - if there was a magic formula which meant no more war, no more divisions, no more fear, no more threats, no more inequality, no more second class citizens - no more conflict - but we all know that there is no magic formula.

The reality is that conflict can't be wished away. We have to work hard - we have to reach out - we have to become partners with our opponents - we have to make friends with our enemies. And then together - collectively - we have to tackle and remove the causes of conflict. In short we need to create the conditions for peace.

Three and a half years ago in our first joint statement John Hume and I stated that *"everyone has a solemn duty to change the political climate away from conflict and towards a process of national reconciliation, which sees the peaceful accommodation of the differences between the people of Britain and Ireland and the Irish people themselves"*.

Together with Albert Reynolds and Irish/America, we succeeded in creating a peaceful environment for negotiations. We created a real possibility for a lasting peace built on accommodation and equality. Even John Major acknowledged that this was the best opportunity for peace in seventy five years.

Yet two years later, with the raised expectations of August 94 still unrealised, we face our greatest challenge yet.

This best opportunity for peace as Mr Major described it, so painstakingly put together by Irish nationalists, was systematically dismantled by the British government. The peace process was slowly strangled. New obstacles were placed in the way of progress. Delaying tactics undermined confidence in the process and deepened distrust.

Why?

Because the British government lacked the will to make peace. It

brought to the new situation. That is why Patrick Mayhew and John Major put the demand for the IRA to surrender its weapons before Sinn Fein would be able to represent our electorate in talks. Because the last thing these gentlemen wanted was real talks on the real issues with republicans challenging the British governments role in the affairs of the people of this island and working with the other parties to find a peaceful alternative.

The British government knew that the IRA was undefeated in August 1994. It knew exactly and precisely the basis for the IRA cessation. It knew that the space created would have to be filled with a viable peace process. Instead of encouraging this the British government sought to micro-manage the process and to reduce the momentum for change so that the dynamic could be controlled by London.

Mr Major and his advisers calculated that if the peace process was stretched and stretched and stretched that the IRA would find it impossible to go back to war. In other words that the IRA would be defeated. The British would then only have to make the minimal changes necessary to underpin this 'new' situation. That was London's mindset. Mr Major miscalculated. He stretched the process to breaking point on a number of occasions. Eventually it snapped.

The result was the collapse of the peace process, and an end to the IRAs cessation after 18 months. The subsequent creation of a 'some-party talks process' is little more than a tactical wrangle, serving the agenda for further delay; the agenda for avoiding, rather than tackling, the substantive issues.

Moreover, the civil rights of Sinn Fein voters and the electoral mandate of this party is ignored. Our vote is more than the sum total of the votes of five of the other parties at the Stormont talks. Having declared that any party which secured a mandate on May 30th would have a direct and automatic route into all-party talks, John Major again changed the rules and shifted the goalposts and excluded this party.] no

Having successfully blocked any talks with Sinn Fein, London then capitulated to Unionist violence and the threat of more violence at Garvaghy Road. The summer saw loyalists kill Michael McGoldrick in Lurgan and the British Army kill Dermot McShane in Derry. IRA Volunteer Diarmuid O'Neill was killed in London and James Bradwell was killed by the IRA at Lisburn. But perhaps the continuing tragedy of ... most distressingly highlighted by the death of 12-

year-old Darren Murray, a young catholic boy who died in an accident as a result of raised sectarian tensions following Drumcree.

So, where do we all go from here?

Dialogue and negotiations is the only way to resolve conflict. It was dialogue, between Sinn Féin, John Hume, the Irish government and Irish America which worked in August '94, to bring about a too brief respite. That opportunity was not consolidated.

Reconstructing this and getting the British on board this time is our most urgent task.

The fact is that we need a viable peace process which can achieve a negotiated settlement by tackling the substantive issues which are at the root of this conflict. Not simply to bring about an IRA cessation, though that is a central element, but a credible and effective peace process which can make peace a reality. That is Sinn Féin's commitment. It is hardly an excessive or unreasonable position.

So what is a viable peace process?

It clearly has to be inclusive. Excluding people won't work. It hasn't worked anywhere else in the world and it hasn't worked here since this little Orange state was founded. That's why we need an inclusive process.

Similarly, preconditions are obstacles to dialogue and progress. They allow those who are afraid of negotiations and of change, an excuse not to get involved. The harder the preconditions, the higher the hurdle, the less likely it is that negotiations will take place. That's why there must be no preconditions placed on any of the parties if there is to be progress.

An important element of any process of negotiation must be a time-frame. In other conflict resolution situations, as well as in disputes between trade unions and employers and between governments, a timetable or time-frame for discussion provides the dynamic and momentum essential to focus minds and produce agreement. The experience of stalling and obstruction at Stormont since June 10 illustrates the need for the two governments to agree a realistic timeframe for the conduct of these negotiations.

And as we all know to our cost, a successful peace process will only be built if confidence and trust exist. This is a matter for all the parties to the negotiations but especially for the British Government. Its approach to the 18-month IRA cessation subverted confidence. Mr Major must show that he will not treat a second IRA cessation and a restored peace process in the same cavalier fashion as he did the last one.

Of course in bringing all of these disparate elements together as a package and making them work, it is crucial that no one has a veto which can block progress. A proper process of negotiation cannot be held hostage to the narrow interests of any group.

The Unionist leaderships are afraid of change. They have used the preconditions introduced by the British as a means of preventing real negotiations. In ways the loyalist parties have shown more openness and imagination than the mainstream unionist leaderships. But the unionist leaderships' stance cannot be divorced from the British one. Neither Mr Trimble nor Mr Paisley will engage in meaningful negotiations until the British government does.

As for the loyalists, they have to be part of the solution also. Sinn Féin has consistently stressed that the loyalists have a right to be involved in an inclusive peace process. But let none of us forget that the current threats to break the loyalist cessation are in reality and to a very large extent threats of a return to the indiscriminate killing of innocent Catholics. No republican wants to see that.

The nationalist people of areas like North Belfast know the savagery of loyalist terrorism. So do Sinn Féin activists and our families. You know how the unionist establishment and British military intelligence has used the loyalists. You also know that the conditional basis of the loyalist cessation is not one which the IRA would ever have got away with. In the two years since the loyalist cessation was announced you know that it has been broken on a number of occasions. I know that some of you are therefore understandably irritated by the lauding of loyalism by the establishment at this time. You should not be.

This is a time for us to be vigilant, to be calm and to be disciplined. This is a time for us to use our leadership abilities. To manage this situation in the context of our republican objectives.

I was one of those who actively encouraged the loyalists to ceasefire

and I am glad that they did so, even on a tactical basis. There are clearly some elements within the loyalist camp which genuinely wish to see a end to this conflict and they should be encouraged.

The others and their cheer leaders should also know that they could not intimidate Sinn Féin in the past. They will not do so in the future. Our party will not be shaken in our resolve to pursue our objectives on behalf of those we represent.

Recent days have also seen the return to the calls for more "security" and for the demonisation of Sinn Féin.

It is a fact that there are some politicians and others who remain stuck in the old psychology - those who 3 years ago vilified John Hume, Albert Reynolds and myself, are again part of the very same chorus which is demanding a return to the old ways - they have learned little and want censorship, marginalisation and repression. Back to shoot-to-kill, back to torture and mass imprisonments, back to the past. Yesterday's failures with yesterday's agenda and no vision of tomorrow.

Well, that's not for this party and for those others who want something better for our children.

If John Hume and I proved anything it is that there is another way. It doesn't have to be the same old story - it is possible to change the script and look to the future with renewed hope and optimism.

The leadership of Sinn Féin remains ready and willing to meet with any of the other parties - the British government the Irish government, the Unionists and the loyalists - in an effort to find a way beyond this critical phase.

If I can add a personal note in the current storm of personalised invective aimed at me. I consider it a great honour to serve the republican struggle. I came into politics to change society here in a very fundamental way. I believe that the British government has no right to be involved in Irish affairs and I believe that Irish republicans have made a significant contribution to the struggle for democracy on this island. We have come a long way and it is my conviction that we will travel the rest of the road and that we will reach that destination. That journey will involve us dealing with the type of people who are vilifying us at this time.

We have important things to do and they do not include kneejerk or descending to name-calling and abuse, whether at the British Tory party conference or from those who know better in Dublin. The situation is much too serious for that.

Let me say again, here today, that Sinn Féin is wholly committed to pursuing with all vigour the goal of a lasting peace in Ireland. We will not be deflected from this task.

The objective reality of this moment in our history is that we are now all faced with hard and difficult choices. Conflict can be ended by one side defeating the other or conflicts can be resolved by negotiated settlement.

Despite the opportunistic demands of David Trimble, Ian Paisley and others for this conflict to be treated as a security problem, it is obvious that this is a political problem requiring a political solution.

Two weeks ago when the Middle East was convulsed in conflict the British government was among the first to call for direct dialogue between the Israelis and the Palestinians. A move strongly supported by the European Union and the United States.

Clearly the international community recognises that where there is no attempt to bring about dialogue, you have a perpetuation of conflict.

Obviously, peace negotiations which can effectively tackle the causes of conflict and which can overcome the failures of the past four years, are best held in a peaceful environment.

There is a time to compete and a time to co-operate. This is a time to reach out beyond the narrow mindsets and agree to co-operate.

Sinn Féin is prepared to go the extra mile for peace. Is John Major?

Two days after the IRA announced its "complete cessation" in August '94 I pointed out that the onus was on John Major to "recognise Sinn Féin's democratic mandate" and to "respond speedily to consolidate the peace" None of that happened.

But the challenge of peace is still there. It is there for Mr Major. It is there for Irish nationalists and

republicans. It is there for Sinn Fein. For the Irish government, for the IRA. This struggle has been a challenging one for republicans. The establishment media are ventilating the demand for another IRA cessation. I regret the breakdown of the last cessation and I continue to work with others to create the conditions for real talks in a peaceful environment. But there has been no indication so far that the British are really interested. So the question has to be asked of John Major. Will he treat another IRA cessation the way he treated the last one? The key is in his hands.