

September, 1996

Senator Sam McAughtry 14 Copeland Crescent Comber Co. Down BT23 5HY

Dear Sam,

Thank you for your letter of 23 August.

I should point out in the first instance that the letter which the Sinn Féin councillor, Mr. Mairtín O 'Muilleoir, was reputedly going to send me, has not in fact been received.

I do however very much agree with your view that the Irish language is part of the heritage and culture of Unionists as well as Nationalists and is no more the property of one community than the other. It is unfortunate that anyone should try to use this shared heritage, and specifically the Irish language, in a divisive way when, if anything, it should be a means by which reconciliation and mutual understanding are promoted.

Improvements over recent years with regard to State support for the Irish language and for Irish language schools will hopefully help to depoliticise the issue.

I can assure you that the Government in its efforts to support the position of the Irish language in Northern Ireland, and in the island generally, is very aware of the need to reach out to both communities. I am sure that this would be a sensitivity shared by all who genuinely seek to promote the language. In this context, we have been particularly pleased to support the work of the Ultach Trust in Northern Ireland.

I might add that your own support for the language as a Trustee of Newry Bunscoil is an example of the cross community appeal of the Irish language.

I very much appreciate that you brought your concerns to my attention.

Yours sincerely

Taoiseach