

1 Copy.

FAX TRANSMISSION

IRISH EMBASSY

17 GROSVENOR PLACE

LONDON

SW1X 7HR

(0171) 201 2512

FAX (0171) 823 1072

PST, PSS, S/S Ó hUiginn,
Counsellors A-I, Section,
Messrs Teachon, Donlon &
Dalton, Ambassadors
London & Washington, Joint
Secretary

To: Anglo-Irish Division, Press Section, Secretariat
Date: 18 July 1996
Pages: including this cover sheet.
From: Helen Blake, Embassy London

Subject: PRIME MINISTER'S QUESTIONS

Tony Blair Madam Speaker, given that as we speak talks are now taking place both here between the British and Irish governments, and in Belfast in respect of the peace process itself, after what by common consent must be judged the most damaging two weeks in the affairs of Northern Ireland since August 1994, can I ask the Prime Minister whether he would agree with me that there are three essential foundation stones to rebuilding support for peace?

The first is that the two governments review their relationship of trust based firmly upon the Anglo-Irish Agreement, the Downing Street Declaration and the other negotiated agreements between them that remain intact and valid.

Secondly that all sides must now demonstrate their complete commitment to the rule of law, and the government their evenhandedness in its application, whether in response to the threat of violence by those engaged in marches, or the evil punishment beatings which claimed their latest victim last night.

And thirdly all parties to the talks on Northern Ireland should move from matters of procedure to matters of substance as soon as is humanly possible, so that we can show to the people of Northern Ireland that the constitutional path to peace has life in it, has hope in it and indeed is the only sane route to the future.

Prime Minister Madam Speaker, the last fourteen days have certainly been extremely difficult for everyone in Northern Ireland, as the Right Honourable Gentleman has said. Let me try and respond to his three points. Certainly in the last few years the British and the Irish governments worked very closely together. That is important for the success of the talks - that that cooperation continues, and it is this governments intention that that cooperation shall continue. I have to say to the House that the Irish government and the British government do not, of course, agree about every issue that is under discussion in these matters. But our relations, I believe, are strong enough both on a government-to-government level and on a personal level, for those talks to continue even with those disagreements in front of us while we seek a solution to them. That is what we are seeking to do.

As far as the rule of law is concerned, of course I agree with the Right Honourable Gentleman. It needs to prevail in Northern Ireland as elsewhere in the United Kingdom. And the scenes we have witnessed over the last few days, the violence and the intimidation and the aftermath of those scenes, are wholly unacceptable and should have no place in Northern Ireland or anywhere else in the United Kingdom.

As to the future and the talks, I entirely agree that the progress so far has been inadequate. It is our intention to try to seek to ensure that the talks move forward rapidly from talks about procedure to talks about substance. And our intention will be to try and turn the set-backs of the last couple of weeks to a positive advantage as the talks resume. And we will bear all our strength to try to achieve that.