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VessPress Statement Northern Ireland Peace ProcessFebruary 17, 1997

The bi-partisan U.S. Congressional delegation, led by Chairman Benjamin A. Gilman, visiting Ireland after carefully evaluating the current status of the peace process following meetings with the parties, as well as representatives of both governments, issued the following statement on Northern Ireland:

We join President Clinton, and the Irish people (both north and south) in reaffirming our overwhelming desire for permanent peace and reconciliation on the island. These worthy and important goals can only be achieved through peaceful dialog and negotiations involving all parties, along with the eventual consent of people to any proposed political solutions.

A prompt restoration of the IRA cease-fire as called for by President Clinton, and many others, plus the cessation of the use of violence by anyone, will serve the cause of peace best, without further diminishing the worthiness or merit of any party's cause. All party inclusive talks and political dialog, in accordance with the terms set out in the Mitchell report, are the only true means for finding the common goal we all share for a just and lasting settlement.

This is an historic opportunity for peace. We urge all concerned to seize the opportunity now and move the peace process forward without the endless dilatory tactics we have so often observed in the past. The British government in particular under whatever party is in power, must continue to lead the process forward and give the search for peace its highest priority by building trust between the two communities, especially after the destructive marches of last year.

Let us hope all sides can step back from a return to the past. We hope the world will never witness again the tragedy of Northern Ireland engaged in an endless cycle of violence, which will deny future generations of all the youth on the island of Ireland the peaceful future and prosperity they desire and deserve.

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Prime Minister

A statement by a group of US Congressmen, including King and Gilman, after a visit to Dublin, Belfast etc. Although it has an indirect swipe at us for being "dilatory", it is in fact a lot better than it could have been. They came with the view that Sinn Féin should just be allowed into the talks. Here their only point of substance is a call for a prompt restoration of the ceasefire. Good work by Burton and Mayhew. Jan 18/2.