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REMARKS BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE, SIR PATRICK MAYHEW, FOLLOWING A VISIT TO ST MACNISI, RANDALSTOWN - 8 APRIL 1997

Interviewer: These people now have to start rebuilding this church, how will the Conservative Party rebuild the peace process if it is re-elected?

SofS: Plainly, we will hold to the belief that by talking there is a chance of helping the people of Northern Ireland come through to a comprehensive settlement and that is the best chance of removing the hatreds and the violence of the division that leads to the sectarian attacks for example. So we will hold to the process of talks, inclusive talks, if that is practicable. But of course inclusive means inclusive of those parties that are prepared to accept democracy and to establish that they are wholly committed to peaceful means.

Interviewer: Even if there is only one Sinn Fein candidate elected, isn't there growing pressure on any Government to include them in talks?

SofS: There's no need to be pressed to include any democratically elected party. But all democrats agree that you cannot sit down and negotiate the future of your democracy or part of your democracy with people who are not prepared to commit themselves to democracy. That is the view of the Irish Government, it is of our own Government, it is fully supported by the American Government and Sinn Fein are excluding themselves because there is no ceasefire and there is no commitment on the part of Sinn Fein and of the IRA to commit themselves wholly to peaceful means.

Interviewer: Nevertheless, Mo Mowlam, who potentially could be the Secretary of State, has already made it clear that in the eventuality of a ceasefire, restoration of the ceasefire and a commitment to the Mitchell principles, that it would be very difficult for any administration to stop Sinn Fein being at the conference table on June 3. Would you see that as an incorrect analysis?

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SofS: Well, I never speculated about a date upon which Sinn Fein might qualify themselves to be invited to join the talks. I never speculated upon that before these latest atrocities and I do not speculate upon it now after this latest series of atrocities. What I will say is that these latest series of atrocities must affect the timescale of the process by which people will need to consider any declared ceasefire. Every succeeding atrocity makes the IRA's credibility gap harder for them to bridge - and of course they have to bridge it - because these talks are talks for people who commit themselves to democracy and to peaceful means.

Interviewer: Secretary of State if people vote for these people, isn't there an onus on people like you to recognise the mandate of those people regardless of what their political allegiances might be?

SofS: Political allegiance are of no concern in a democracy. But what is of concern is commitment to democracy. I've already said that you cannot expect people to sit down in a democracy, who are committed to the disciplines of democracy, when across the table there are people who are not, and who threaten to supplement their democratic vote with Semtex and bullets and mortars. You will not find people prepared to sit down and talk in those circumstances: they will leave and if you insist that they should be put to that test then you will destroy the very process upon which every hope of progress here in Northern Ireland depends.

Interviewer: Are you saying in effect that events of last week in Britain make it more difficult for Sinn Fein to be admitted to talks?

SofS: Yes I am exactly saying that.

Interviewer: I think that most people will accept the thrust of your argument, most conventional constitutionalists, in terms of if there is violence then people won't be at the conference table. But is it morally tenable to argue that just because somebody else will walk away from the talks against the backdrop of a ceasefire and a commitment to Mitchell that there shouldn't be talks?

SofS: Nobody is arguing that. There should be talks. The process

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of talking is the only means by which progress towards a comprehensive settlement can be made in Northern Ireland. We are talking about not whether there should be talks but who should be at them and it is neither morally tenable nor practicably tenable to argue that people who resort to violence should be admitted to those talks notwithstanding that the result will be that other people will walk out and leave.

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