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## *A Message from Concerned Irish Americans*

June 17, 1997

The history of the struggle in Ireland has been a history of tragedy and suffering. It also has been a history of lost opportunities. Whether it be Britain's failure to enter into all-party talks during the seventeen-month Irish Republican Army cease-fire just two years ago or yesterday's tragic killing by the IRA of two RUC officers in Armagh, shortsighted self-interest inexorably has led to further violence and division.

Ireland's future, however, need not be a prisoner of its past. We strongly believe that the current converging of unprecedented events offers all parties to the Irish conflict an historic opportunity to end that island's centuries-old cycle of repression and violence.

Britain's May 1st elections resulted in a government unfettered by the threat of veto by a small group of Ulster Unionists. In the wake of his landslide victory, Tony Blair has kept his word by undertaking meaningful initiatives on the Irish issue. They are solid, confidence-building measures.

The May 29th meeting in London between Blair and President Clinton was particularly reassuring. Both the Prime Minister and the President called for all-party talks following an IRA cease-fire without any extraneous preconditions such as decommissioning. For too long, John Major and his government had used these preconditions to frustrate the peace process.

Also significant has been the strong electoral showing of Sinn Fein. By electing Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness in the Westminster elections and Caoimhin O Caolain to the Dail in the Republic, and by increasing its vote in the local elections, Sinn Fein has demonstrated the broad extent of its mandate. It has shown that it must be an integral part of any meaningful peace process. That is why the British government must remove all ambiguity and make it clear that Sinn Fein will be admitted to the talks very soon after an IRA cease-fire and that all substantive issues will be addressed.

The election of Bertie Ahern as Taoiseach and the importance he has attached to the peace process demonstrate the commitment of the Irish government to pursuing a settlement in the north.

Distinctly disappointing has been the negative posturing of the unionist political establishment led by David Trimble and Ian Paisley. Rather than demonstrate leadership, they have thrown repeated roadblocks in the path of progress and appealed to base sectarianism on such issues as the loyalist marches through nationalist communities.

The essential component to the success of the peace process, however, is the continued involvement of President Clinton and the United States government. No American President has



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done more for peace and justice in Ireland than Bill Clinton. His 1994 decision to grant a visa to Gerry Adams, his peace mission to Belfast, Derry and Dublin in 1995 and last month's meeting with Tony Blair demonstrate the President's commitment to the United States being an honest broker and, in effect, a guarantor of the peace talks.

A British government taking constructive action; Sinn Fein demonstrating its electoral might; an Irish government pledged to the peace process; and an American President having unsurpassed interest in resolving the Irish conflict -- this is a moment which must be seized. It is an opportunity which must not be lost.

We urge the British government to make it clear that Sinn Fein will be admitted to all-party talks without delay following an IRA cease-fire, that all issues will be on the table with no single issue obstructing the talks and that the talks have an agreed upon timetable.

We urge David Trimble and Ian Paisley to end their discredited policies of obstruction, threat and sectarianism and agree to good-faith, all-party talks.

We urge loyalist paramilitaries to cease all acts of violence.

We urge the Irish Republican Army to call an unequivocal cease-fire.

By taking these courageous actions, the British government, the unionists, the loyalists, and the IRA will be allowing a process to go forward which will benefit all the people of Ireland -- north and south.

During his visit to Ireland President Clinton movingly quoted Seamus Heaney that this is a time when "hope and history rhyme." It is the duty of all good people who truly want peace in Ireland to act upon the truth of those words.

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