

INTERVIEW WITH KEN READ FOR UTV - 12 SEPTEMBER 1997

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KR After yesterday's statement do you still think there is a relationship between Sinn Fein and the IRA

PM We have always believed that Sinn Fein and the IRA are inextricably linked. That's why when Sinn Fein sign up to as they have done to the Mitchell principles which means they are committed to the non violent democratic path we must hold them to that to make sure that that principle is satisfied.

KR Do you understand the peoples' concern about the gun being brought back into politics?

PM That's precisely why I expect the Mitchell principles to be adhered to and if they are not adhered to by any party they will be out of the talks.

KR There has been some confusion about consent, what do you understand by consent?

PM My understanding of consent is that there must be no change in the constitutional status of Northern Ireland without the consent of the majority of people in Northern Ireland. Furthermore that that applies to the process of negotiation that the safeguards that are there, the triple lock if you like, must be an arrangement that meets and agreed is to by the parties, Parliament and the people

KR Do you think the principle of consent will apply right through the negotiations?

PM Yes that is all part of building of confidence that we can get a democratic lasting political settlement.

KR There are also obvious worries about decommissioning.....?

PM The document that we have agreed with the Irish Government is in essence the document that the previous British government had negotiated with and what we are trying to do is to make sure that we don't set up preconditions or obstacles but we do get decommissioning as quickly as possible. My own view is that we should get decommissioning now. I don't believe there is any justification for any illegally held weapons to be there at all. That we set up a process and expect all parties to adhere to that process in good faith, say that we want to see actual decommissioning during the process of negotiation

KR The IRA says that in their view handing in guns is tantamount to surrender?

PM I don't think that's true at all. We must try to give people the very best chance to begin negotiating on the substance of a lasting political settlement for Northern Ireland. The most frustrating thing about this process is that there is a substantial measure of agreement both that there needs to be some form of relationship between Northern Ireland and the Republic and there needs to be a system of devolution of power in Northern Ireland itself. And what I would like to do is to get on and discuss those cross border arrangements, the devolved assembly, the substance of the negotiations so that we can put in place that lasting settlement, get it agreed by the people and start a situation in Northern Ireland where politics is about the things that it should be about - schools, hospitals, crime rate, jobs for people rather than what it has been about.

KR The Unionists have a very important decision to make about the talks - what would you say to the Unionists?

PM Well I don't want to presume more or intrude upon their discussion in any way that is unhelpful at all. All I would simply say is that there are all sorts of extremists in the situation who want to wreck this process, because they don't really want a settlement. I think that decent moderate people, that huge majority of people in Northern Ireland want to see a situation where the Unionists' concerns are represented very directly in any corners where Sinn Fein are confronted with the arguments that are being made and my firm conviction is that it is better that people are in there arguing their case on the firm understanding that the agreements in relation to non-violence of the Mitchell principles will be enforced by the Government, that it is better for them to be in that process rather than outside it.

KR And looking ahead to next week you are still determined no matter what that a referendum ...

PM I want that to happen. I mean I desperately want it to happen because I think we are in a situation where there is the potential for hope that what I have learned about the situation in just these few months of government is that if it isn't moved forward, it slides backwards and I desperately want it to move forward.

KR Can I ask you just one final question. Do you intend to give Gerry Adams ...

PM Well there are no decisions that have been taken on that at all yet and any such decisions will be taken in the future. What I think is important is that if we can get a decent process going and we can start talking about the substance of a lasting political settlement in Northern Ireland, that so many more things become possible, so many more doors are opened and all the way through the most heart rendering moment for me since the election in relation to Northern Ireland was meeting young people from both sides of the

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community that came and saw me in Downing Street and I met those young people and they spent a week in London. It was the first time they had really been mixed together from the two sides of the two traditions and there they were with the same interests, the same likes, the same desires with what they wanted to do with their lives and yet separated by this appalling historical legacy. Well I just feel an urgent sense of responsibility to remove that and allow them to lead normal lives and get on together.

KR And you will play a role in that?

PM I will play a very important role in that. I am committed to and I said before the election I would be and I am now.

KR Prime Minister, thank you