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**Irish Draft 7.1.98****Joint Statement by the Taoiseach and British Prime Minister**

The Taoiseach and Prime Minister have reviewed together the present situation. They condemn in the strongest terms the recent murders in Northern Ireland, which have rightly been a source of revulsion to the vast majority of people of Ireland and Britain. They reiterate the determination of both Governments that violence will not be allowed to prevail and that the primacy of the political process will be upheld.

Recalling the terms of the Downing St Declaration, the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister acknowledge the progress that has been made towards removing the causes of conflict, overcoming the legacy of history and healing the divisions which have resulted. In that context, they reaffirm their belief in the central importance and value of the Talks process.

Acknowledging the critical role of their two Governments in that regard, they resolve that both shall continue to act together in the closest co-operation to ensure that swift progress is made towards the establishment of a lasting and honourable settlement. Recognising the important role in the process of the parties, as the democratically mandated representatives of the people, they commit their Governments to working closely and in solidarity with all involved towards the common objective of agreement.

They believe that the necessary elements are now in place and that the time has come to translate the potential that exists into the reality of such an agreement. As the Talks resume after the Christmas break, they are determined, therefore, to provide active encouragement and support for the participants to engage in the detailed resolution of the core issues involved, and to move rapidly towards an overall agreement. While the deadline of May remains in place, they believe that, with goodwill and determination all round, it will prove possible to reach outline agreement well before that.



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The Taoiseach and the Prime Minister acknowledge the critical contribution that has been made by the ceasefires, both republican and loyalist. They reiterate their view that the maintenance of those ceasefires is essential to the establishment of further progress towards a settlement.

The Taoiseach and the Prime Minister believe that a particularly crucial and decisive juncture has been reached in terms of realising the common goals and principles identified in the Downing St Declaration and more generally by the two Governments over the past 25 years. They call on all concerned to undertake every effort to ensure that the unprecedented opportunity that now exists is grasped to the full. This is the wish of the vast majority of people of both islands. It is also the wish of those abroad, particularly in the US and the European Union, whose support has been so important in the establishment of progress to date. The Taoiseach and Prime Minister look forward personally, together with their Governments, to playing their full and determined part in ensuring that 1998 is truly an historic year in Anglo-Irish relations and that, as the new millennium approaches, the legacy of the past can finally be set aside and overcome.