



**BRITISH-IRISH
INTER-PARLIAMENTARY BODY**

**COMHLACHT IDIR-PHARLAIMINTEACH
NA BREATAINE AGUS NA hÉIREANN**

SIXTEENTH PLENARY SESSION

15 May 1998

Dublin Castle

OFFICIAL REPORT
(Final Revised Edition)

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SIXTEENTH PLENARY SESSION

The Sixteenth Plenary Conference of the Body opened in public session at 9.30 a.m. in the main conference hall, Dublin Castle, with Mr Michael O'Kennedy in the Chair.

The Chairman welcomed members to what was the first extraordinary meeting of the Body and expressed appreciation for their attendance at short notice. This was an historic occasion not only for the Body but more importantly for those who were affected by the Good Friday Agreement. The Governments and parties had put much work into achieving an historic compromise; so it was important that the Body, made up of democratically-elected representatives of the people of Britain and Ireland, should endorse that work and encourage a spirit of tolerance based on the confidence that a common understanding would enable people to work towards a common purpose.

Members had established a good rapport which allowed them express views without qualification or inhibition. Nonetheless, they should have regard to the sensitivities of those voting, especially those in the North, and should try to avoid anything which would provoke a negative reaction. This was an occasion to give positive support to the extraordinary efforts of those who had produced the Agreement; and he hoped Members would be able to look back on the debate as fruitful and worthwhile.

He proposed that in the special circumstances in which they were meeting, both he and his fellow Co-Chairman Mr David Winnick should jointly chair the meeting.

1. TIME LIMIT ON SPEECHES

Ordered, That in respect of the debate on Recent Political Developments, members opening and closing the debate shall speak for not more than ten minutes each and other members shall speak for not more than four minutes each.-(**The Chairman**).

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3. SITTINGS OF THE BODY

Motion made, and Question proposed:

That in respect of this day's sitting, Rule 10 shall have effect as if for the words "six weeks" there were substituted the words "two weeks".-(**The Chairman**).

The Chairman, moving the motion, informed members that the purpose of the motion was to regularise the insufficient notice for the meeting so that it would be in accordance with the Body's standing orders.

And the Question being put;

Ordered, That in respect of this day's sitting, Rule 10 shall have effect as if for the words "six weeks" there were substituted the words "two weeks".

4. ADOPTION OF PROPOSED PROGRAMME OF BUSINESS

Ordered, That the proposed Programme of Business be approved.-(**The Chairman**).

5. PRIVILEGE

The Chairman reminded members that the proceedings of the Body did not attract parliamentary privilege.

6. RECENT POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Motion made, and Question proposed:

That the Body, recalling the unanimous approval of its motion on the multi-party talks at its recent 15th Plenary Session in Ballyconnell, Co. Cavan, welcomes the historic Agreement reached in the multi-party negotiations, congratulates all the

participants in the talks on reaching agreement, and looks forward to its endorsement by the people in the referenda, North and South, and to its successful implementation.-(**Mr Charles Flanagan**).

Mr Charles Flanagan (Laois-Offaly) said that a strong "Yes" vote would set the island of Ireland on a road to peace, harmony and reconciliation; and while opinion polls suggested this was the most likely outcome on both sides of the Border there should be no complacency. This was an unprecedented and possibly unrepeatable opportunity. Politicians alone would not achieve a resounding "Yes" vote. There was a duty on those in public affairs - church leaders, captains of industry, the voluntary sector, the business community, farmers, trade unions and residents' associations - to campaign actively in their communities to ensure a convincing margin of approval. While the questions in the North and the Republic were different, the answer was the same: a vote for peace, reconciliation and a future in which all everyone could live in harmony under democracy. The objective of every citizen was a peaceful and prosperous Northern Ireland with both communities operating in partnership as never before.

No-one liked all of the deal and that was never possible, given the polarised nature of politics on our island. The Agreement should be examined as a package, the rough taken with the smooth. To pick one section of it in isolation, as some politicians had done in recent days, did not do justice to the work of those involved. Those who had campaigned against it should cast aside the barren infertile message of "no" which had been heard for far too long. He quoted from the "Declaration of Support" in the Agreement:

The tragedies of the past have left a deep and profoundly regrettable legacy of suffering. We must never forget those who have died or been injured, and their families. But we can best honour them through a fresh start, in which we firmly dedicate ourselves to the achievement of reconciliation, tolerance, and mutual trust, and to the protection and vindication of the human rights of all.

There was no monopoly of suffering on one side of the community and it was important that the Agreement emphasised "the protection and vindication of the human rights of all".

The rights, safeguards and equality of opportunity built into Strand Three had not been sufficiently emphasised in the concentration on Strands One and Two. The provisions of Strand Three sought to meet long-standing requirements of the Nationalist community and the principles of equality were enshrined on a basis which did not represent a threat to anyone in Northern Ireland.

The politics of aspiration must be replaced with the politics of accommodation and we must cast aside notions that the Agreement was a victory for one side over the other. Victory and supremacy must give way to mutual understanding and trust. Anything less than a convincing "Yes" vote would be disturbing but a wide margin in favour would allow the architects of the Agreement to proceed with the necessary

confidence to ensure that it was followed through as everyone would wish. To ensure this, every citizen North and South must undertake the civic duty of voting; and he hoped that employers would facilitate this by making time available. The island of Ireland had the opportunity to say "Yes" to the future and to peace by recording a resounding "Yes" to the Agreement.

Maria Fyfe (Glasgow Maryhill) said that everyone should realise it was hard for people who had been at each other's throats for even a few days, let alone decades or centuries, even to begin not to think that a gain for the other side must mean a loss for their own, even if they could not quantify it. "Ulster says No" must be one of the best known statements in these islands. For those growing up with that, a huge shift was required to say "Yes". Their reassurance could be found in the detail of the Agreement. However, the problem for David Trimble and all men of goodwill on the Unionist side was that detail was hard to sloganise.

Referring to the opinion poll published that morning, which indicated only 35 per cent of Unionist voters supporting the agreement, with 45 per cent against and 20 per cent undecided, she said that those who wanted the Agreement to succeed must consider how they could help and not hinder the task of winning over the undecided 20 per cent. Everyone must get involved in campaigning. It was especially to be hoped that women's groups in the North would show their strength because they had shown an ability to combine together to work for peace. Mothers had lost sons and daughters and wives have lost husbands. A sudden tragic death in a family from the Troubles brought home the necessity of avoiding violence in the future. That is why the participation of women could be a great strength.

The referendum in Scotland and the creation of a new Scots Parliament for the first time in 300 years was important. However, this Agreement was far more important for Northern Ireland because it was concerned with the creation of peace. The loss from voting "No" would be terrible.

Senator Mary Henry agreed with Ms Fyfe. While people on all sides in Northern Ireland had suffered, not enough effort had been made to understand their suffering and to emphasise that it must be especially difficult for them to consider matters objectively. Perceptions could be very important. For example, a position might be understood but might not be explained sufficiently. Those involved with victims' groups in Northern Ireland had to make it clear that their suffering was recognised.

Women's groups had worked on a cross-community and cross-Border basis for 25 years and had held civil society together in an extraordinary manner. It was important for them to say that people's pain was recognised; not to do so would be remiss. Apologies could sound very sincere at moments like this; it was a good time to apologise. It could, for example, mean much to the husband of a victim who had been interviewed on television on the previous night. Efforts of cross-community groups over the past 25 years had been strong and wonderful. It was of the greatest importance if they could hold people together at the present time.

Mr Roger Stott (Wigan) explained that in 1989 his then party leader, Neil Kinnock, asked him to go to Northern Ireland as one of the Labour Party spokesmen. He had had the great honour and pleasure to work with Kevin McNamara. He went on to outline his abiding interest in Northern Ireland since then. He had seen what had happened and had understood the yearning of the people for an end to the violence and for peaceful coexistence.

Two experiences were etched on his mind. The first concerned the slaughter in the Rising Sun Bar in Greysteel and seeing the tears on John Hume's face at the funeral. Six weeks later, he went to Greysteel and stood outside the boarded-up bar and the owner, whose 80 year old father had been shot dead, brought him inside and gave him a cup of tea. It was a deeply moving experience for him.

The second experience involved the Plenary Session of the Body at Adare Manor when he met Garda Jerry McCabe. They frequently walked the grounds together and became friends. Six weeks later he heard that Garda McCabe had been murdered.

There was now an opportunity to do something positive; and to that end he was travelling to Derry the following week to work in John Hume's office in the campaign for a "Yes" vote. For the benefit of those who wondered why a British Protestant wanted to parachute into Northern Ireland to work on the campaign, he explained that 14 young soldiers from Wigan were on the streets of Northern Ireland and he wanted a "Yes" vote to get them home.

Mr Jimmy Deenihan (Kerry North) thanked the Co-Chairman for allowing him to speak at an early stage as he had to travel to County Kerry to campaign for the referendum on the Amsterdam Treaty. He had no doubt that the referendum on Northern Ireland would be passed overwhelmingly in the South. However, given the difficulties in the North, people in the South could encourage or discourage the vote there. Any demonstration of triumphalism, as had happened recently, could have a damaging effect on the attitude of Northern Unionists who still had doubts about the Agreement. They should be sent a strong message that they had nothing to fear from the Agreement. While there were elements in the Agreement which might threaten, there was something in it for everyone; and while there was no doubt that the Agreement would be endorsed there was no room for complacency.

The proposed new structures would afford new opportunities on all three Strands. In this respect, the challenge would begin after the vote on the referendum. It was important to be proactive to ensure the Agreement was meaningful, with a dividend for everybody.

There was a need to look at the role of the Body in the future because it could have an important role to play as a forum for politicians on both islands and on both parts of the island of Ireland. It should not be dismissed because new structures might be created. It had promoted major understanding between politicians on both islands and had demonstrated there was little difference between the members of the two

Parliaments in their outlook on life and on politics. People must look ahead with confidence, determined to make the Agreement work.

Mr Denis Canavan (Falkirk West) thanked all those responsible for the Good Friday Agreement, including the Taoiseach, the Prime Minister, other representatives of both Governments, Senator George Mitchell and the representatives of the people of Northern Ireland who took part in the negotiations.

No-one had got one hundred per cent of what they wanted and compromise was required on both sides. Despite the extravagant language used in the referendum campaign in the North, it was not a case of victory for one community and defeat for the other. If the Agreement was to develop into a lasting settlement, all the people of Northern Ireland would be the winners.

Recent opinion polls had indicated continuing deep divisions in the Unionist community. The poll in that day's *Irish Times* indicated that only 35 per cent of the Unionist community would vote "Yes", 45 per cent "No" and 20 per cent undecided. This represented a swing from "Yes" to "No" since Good Friday. There was no room for complacency regarding the result in the North. He was disappointed the Unionist community was not represented in the Inter-Parliamentary Body to articulate its fears.

He quoted from paragraph 1(1) of Annex A of the Agreement:

It is hereby declared that Northern Ireland in its entirety remains part of the United Kingdom and shall not cease to be so without the consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland...

That should assure the Unionist community and its acceptance would indicate a remarkable concession on the part of people of a Nationalist or Republican persuasion. It was important that no-one had been asked to surrender their principles or ultimate objectives, provided they pursued them by exclusively peaceful means. Unionists could defend the Union and Nationalists could seek to persuade others of the merits of a united Ireland.

He had always believed in the cause of a united Ireland and would continue to do so. His grandfather was born in the last century in that part of Ireland now called "Northern Ireland". The partition of Ireland was a mistake; but sometimes it was very difficult for the present generation of politicians to undo mistakes made by their predecessors. The clock could not be turned back, nor could the past be recreated. However, they could learn from the mistakes of the past and build a better future.

Next Friday, the people of Ireland, North and South, would have a historic to vote for a better future. He expressed the hope that they would seize that opportunity by voting "Yes" and that what would eventually emerge would be a new agreed Ireland where people in the North and in the South and of different religious and political

traditions could live together in peace and harmony with respect for each other's beliefs and traditions.

Senator Joe Costello expressed support for the motion. He welcomed the Agreement, congratulated all the participants, looked forward to its endorsement in the two referenda and to its successful implementation. It was a carefully crafted and balanced document and a historic compromise. There was pain and gain for Nationalists and Unionists alike. If it was ratified the Nationalists would relinquish their constitutional claim to the territory of Northern Ireland, which was the cornerstone of the armed campaign. Similarly, Unionists would have to accept power sharing with Nationalists in Northern Ireland and a North-South Ministerial Council with implementation bodies and a new relationship with the Republic. In return, the two communities on the island of Ireland would have their traditional fears and hostilities eliminated through mutual acceptance that the concept of co-operation would, henceforth, be the guiding principle for the future aspirations of both communities.

200 years ago, the United Irishmen were founded and led by Protestants, North and South, whose objective was to unite Irishmen and Irishwomen, Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter. James Connolly, the founder of the Labour Party in Ireland said:

Ireland without her people is nothing to me. The man who is bubbling over with enthusiasm for Ireland and can yet pass and move through the streets and witness all the wrong and suffering, the shame and degradation wrought on the people of Ireland, aye, wrought by Irish men upon Irish men and Irish women, without burning to end it is, in my opinion, a fraud and a liar in his heart no matter how he loves that combination of chemical elements that he is pleased to call Ireland.

The Agreement was back to the future, where the good of the past was selected to mould the future. It made the wishes and welfare of the people paramount and that is why it had to succeed. However, as yet, the historic agreement between the main parties, North and South, was only a statement of intent. It needed the *imprimatur* of the people to make it a historic departure from the old to the new.

Progress was fraught with new dangers as the moment of truth on 22 May approached. The suffering of victims and the anger of their relatives, the release of prisoners and the decommissioning of weapons were causing the most severe heart-searching for Unionist voters. The appointment by the British Government of a Minister for victims was a welcome move. The release of prisoners and decommissioning was covered by the Agreement; and the provisions had to be enforced under the agreed terms for its implementation.

Nationalist voters on both sides of the Border appeared to have addressed and accepted the diminution of traditional Republican values with greater equanimity. However, there was no place for triumphalism in the settlement. A victory for either side would be a failure for both. He hoped that in the following week they would be

celebrating a new deal for the people of Ireland and the two islands at the dawn of the new millennium.

Dr Norman Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde) had been in Belfast with the "Yes" campaign team. The points made by Senator Costello and Deputy Deenihan about triumphalism and the prisoners issue reminded him of comments made to him by Unionists, some of whom were despondent and who said that they would definitely vote "No".

For a Scottish Labour MP it had been a remarkable year. The Scottish referendum had produced an astonishing result. There was a very high turnout and the result had profound consequences, both intended and unintended, especially for Northern Ireland and other parts of the United Kingdom. It demonstrated that the UK was undergoing radical constitutional change which must affect Northern Ireland.

The Bloody Sunday inquiry was a remarkable achievement by the Government, and it was followed by the Good Friday Agreement. However, there was still a long way to go in the referendum campaign because a solid "Yes" vote was needed in the Unionist constituency. The leaders of the "Yes" campaign team were doing an excellent job in the Unionist community. There would be a high turnout in the Nationalist community and a large majority of Nationalists would vote "Yes". However, the critical issue was to get Unionists to vote "Yes". Much remained to be done, but there was much at stake.

Ms Marian McGennis (Dublin Central) said that the motion rightly congratulated all the participants in the talks process. However, there was no single architect of the Good Friday Agreement or single defining moment when despair changed to hope for the people of Northern Ireland. Many people had played their part in putting together the relationships which had allowed the historic Agreement to come about, while others had worked behind the scenes. A debt was owed to all of them. The British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body had also played an important part. Over the years the members had worked quietly and conscientiously to promote co-operation, peace and political progress within the islands.

Hundreds of community groups, North and South, had worked for peace and reconciliation from the start. Special tribute should be paid to those who organised the annual united prayer breakfasts. She had learned at last year's breakfast the true meaning of forgiveness, faith and hope. Unfortunately, some of the people she had met there were campaigning against the Agreement. She regretted that opposition; but the spirit of the prayer breakfast movement would be a positive factor in the future.

Through the breakfasts she had had the opportunity to learn at first hand the thoughts and experiences of victims of the Troubles. Victims of violence and their families, whose pain could not easily be erased, were in the thoughts of all members. She agreed that the greatest tribute which could be paid to them was to ensure that there were no more killings, maimings and suffering. That could be achieved; but it

was not enough. Practical measures were also needed such as counselling, guidance, support and, in some cases, compensation. In time, there had to be a fitting memorial which reflected the needs of victims and their families.

However, one step had to be taken without further delay. Paramilitaries from all sides had to set about ascertaining the location of bodies of missing victims and make that information available to the families. It was a grievous wrong that families continued to suffer without knowing what happened to their loved ones. This must be a priority issue for the Victims Commission in the months ahead.

She was proud of what Republicans and women's groups had brought to the Agreement. It was questionable whether such advances could have been made without the input of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition and the dynamic Dr Mo Mowlam. Their voices often cut through the political mire and illuminated the road of reason and progress. She wished the Women's Coalition well in the Assembly elections. It would be a lesser body if they were not represented.

She quoted Éamon de Valera at the inaugural meeting of Fianna Fáil:

We must not allow ourselves to be hypnotised by our own prejudices and feelings on the one hand or by our opponents' propaganda on the other. To underestimate our strength is an even worse fault than to overestimate it. We must not allow our opponents to dissuade us from the task that is well within our power by suggesting it is impossible.

The talks participants followed the spirit of those words many times.

Ms McGennis acknowledged the work of the Taoiseach, Mr Bertie Ahern TD, the British Prime Minister, Mr Tony Blair MP, and the many others who participated in the talks process. Politicians had to ensure that people vote in huge numbers for the Agreement.

Lord Holme of Cheltenham said that his fear about the referendum vote in Northern Ireland was that the "Yes" campaign had been too defensive. It was imperative in the days remaining to expose the moral and political bankruptcy of the "No" campaign, which was saying "No" to the future, to peace and to prosperity. There was a political job to do if there was to be a larger, positive vote in the Unionist community. The position had not been helped by the triumphalism shown when a certain group of people were compared to President Mandela. However, there was no alternative. It was imperative that the message got through in Northern Ireland, and particularly to the Unionist people.

People were in danger of looking at the referenda as the end and thinking that all the trouble would stop with a "Yes" vote. However, as the British Prime Minister had said, it was the beginning, not an end. It would be infinitely difficult to move on in Northern Ireland from economic and political dependency to sharing real decisions. It would require both communities to stop looking over their shoulders at their

respective powerful parents and start looking at and talking to each other. It would mean great change in the way of working.

It was the beginning of a new era of deeper friendship between the peoples of the islands and an occasion of extraordinary historical significance. People talked about a peace dividend in Northern Ireland, but there was now a political, economic and cultural friendship dividend available to the people of Britain and Ireland. Relations between the two countries had always been better than the publicity suggested, but a historic reconciliation was now possible and the its potential could be reached.

Dr Rory O'Hanlon (Cavan-Monaghan) said that the Agreement was fair and equitable. It would create a better life for the two communities and allow them to work together in determining their own future. The two Governments were the honest brokers; and he complimented all those who had negotiated the Agreement. It included compromise, but it also contained the element of consent and safeguards for the two communities.

The referenda would be an historic occasion because it was the first time since 1918 that all the people on the island had voted on a single issue. A referendum was the greatest act of democracy because people were voting on one issue. It would give people an opportunity to say that they wanted peace and the Agreement to be implemented. It would also be an opportunity to tell people who engaged in violence that there was no place for them or for negative politics on the island. It was important there was a massive "Yes" vote.

He was concerned about the level of fear and mistrust in both communities in Northern Ireland. Everybody with influence should try to create an environment where trust, optimism and confidence could be built. The paramilitary organisations and those who had influence on them should make it clear that they would accept the approach to decommissioning contained in the Agreement. The sporting organisations should also consider their role in creating a better environment. The Orange Order should consider what it could do in terms of its parades to create a better climate, and the British Government might consider demilitarisation, particularly in sensitive areas such as South Armagh where there were concerns that the level of security activity had increased rather than diminished since the Agreement.

The British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body had over the years created a much better environment and greater trust between the Members of both Parliaments. This had facilitated the two Governments in making progress. He hoped that there would be no amendments to the Agreement; regarding the elections, he hoped that no preconditions would be placed on the participants.

Lord Merlyn-Rees welcomed the Agreement as a great move forward. He congratulated the Governments of all political persuasions in Britain and the Republic and the leaders in the North who had brought their followers in directions that were considered impossible a year ago. Leadership was not always a matter of

going forward. It sometimes involved bringing reality to the led. The leaders in the North had done that in a society where 3,000 people had died, and people on his side of the water did not understand that point.

The motion before the Plenary sought consent. The Body should commend the Agreement and not issue threats, such as what would happen if it was not approved. Problems remained and a solution had not yet been achieved. The Agreement had not achieved a solution in Northern Ireland but had built a structure which enabled everyone to move forward. He hoped that the Body would congratulate those who had achieved that progress, that consent would be forthcoming from the people on both sides of the Border, and that they could work together to overcome the remaining problems, not least decommissioning and working together in Government. Talking about democracy was easy but working it was difficult. Only the people in the North and South could end the Troubles - it could not be done from the outside.

Mr Andrew Boylan (Cavan-Monaghan) supported the motion and the Agreement and congratulated everyone involved in bringing about the document against the odds and contrary to the beliefs of many commentators who felt it impossible. Agreement was reached because people of good will had decided it would be and that they would work until they devised something which could be put to the people.

In the immediate aftermath of the Agreement there was a groundswell of good will but the opinion poll in that morning's paper was alarming; while support was solid in the South at 72 per cent the "Yes" figure of 56 per cent in the North was somewhat marginal. People arguing against the Agreement in the North were getting their message across, which they were entitled to do. However, it was not the argument against the Agreement which caused the swing to the "No" camp but the parade of paramilitary gunmen welcomed home by their respective supporters like heroes, which they were not and never would be. This had caused hurt to those whose relatives had been brutally murdered, and to those whose relatives' bodies had not been returned. The victims of violence should not be forgotten in the "Yes" campaign. Both Governments should clearly state that the convicted people should serve their sentence; they were not acting on behalf of anyone else but in their own selfish interests. Until that declaration was made people who wanted to live in peace with their neighbours would feel betrayed. This action would, he felt, turn the tide in favour of a "Yes" vote. People in the North wanted the same things as those in the South - to work, live and to raise their families. This could and would happen but they had to be told they would not be forgotten.

Mr Kevin McNamara (Hull North) supported the motion and welcomed, with elation, the Agreement. Circles could never be squared but the Agreement had recognised the integrity and dignity of the two communities and sought a way forward. He congratulated all those involved in bringing it about.

One group which had hardly been mentioned were the people of Britain, who would be astonished if the referendum was not overwhelmingly carried. He could not state that the Agreement had been fully studied in Britain but there was a desire to see peace with justice and honour in Northern Ireland, and for the communities to live together and respect one another. His constituents knew that this problem - of which they were a part but which they did not understand - was at a moment of possible reconciliation, and they would not understand if the Agreement was not accepted by people in the North, especially by those who claimed allegiance to the Union. They would not understand the rejection of the fruits of a difficult and skilful negotiation process.

In the run-up to the referendum people would seek to cherry-pick and to obtain further concessions but this must be resisted by both Governments. This was a carefully balanced Agreement and any attempt to undermine or over-emphasise different elements would upset the delicate balance which had been achieved. It was a whole package or nothing. It could not be added to or subtracted from until such change was made by and with the consent of both communities according to the rules of the new assembly. The Body should urge a large turnout on referendum day.

Mr Dinny McGinley (Donegal South West) supported the motion and joined in the welcome for the Agreement. Last Good Friday was the best for many years and he paid tribute to all who had brought the Agreement into being, including both Prime Ministers and Senator Mitchell, and to people who worked for peace in the past such as the former Taoisigh, Mr Liam Cosgrave, Dr Garret FitzGerald and Mr John Bruton TD, and the former Tánaiste, Mr Dick Spring TD.

The referendum was merely the first hurdle in the implementation of the Agreement. There had been false dawns before and it was important that there be a resounding "Yes" on both sides of the Border. It looked encouraging in the South but there were worrying signs in the North; a Nationalist "Yes" vote was not sufficient: the Unionists also had to support it with a resounding majority. He joined in the concern about events in recent days which made it difficult for people to give support but hoped that the matter would be addressed in the coming days to ensure an equally strong "Yes" vote in Northern Ireland.

It had been said there would be an economic resurgence when the Agreement was implemented; but there was also a downside. For instance, the huge security industry in Northern Ireland would be affected. It was likely that the British Army would be withdrawn, which would cause economic disruption. The RUC was, *per capita*, the largest police force in Europe and it would be significantly reduced if peace was established. The legal and medical sectors would be affected also.

He hoped that the international rejoicing at the Agreement would be translated into long-term interest in the North. The danger was that people would regard everything as solved; but there were many hurdles to be negotiated before the realisation of a normal democratic society. He hoped that the peace would be underpinned by

economic investment and in that regard welcomed the announcements by the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the British Prime Minister. He also hoped that the International Fund for Ireland would continue to underpin economic projects in Northern Ireland and the Border counties and that the EU would continue to invest, because investment would be needed more than ever after the referendum. As an Ulsterman, nothing would give him greater pleasure than the attendance of Unionist colleagues at the next Plenary of the Body.

Mr John Home Robertson (East Lothian) referring to Deputy Boylan's remarks, said that if a member of his family had been a victim of the conflict he would have found it difficult to take the spectacle of the culprits being treated as heroes. There had been few instances of re-offending among terrorists who had been convicted. It was important to remember that those who would be released under this scheme would be under licence, and if there was an indication of a likelihood of re-offending they could be detained again. He hoped that the police would be vigilant in that regard because people were entitled to that reassurance.

In the Scottish referendum 75 per cent of the turnout had voted for radical constitutional change; home rule within the United Kingdom. That was a target which the Irish should seek to beat. As a Scot, he welcomed the replacement of the Anglo-Irish Agreement with the British-Irish Council, as it gave parity of esteem to the Scots and the Welsh. That Council would feature representatives of the Scots Parliament and the Welsh Assembly; and if he became a member of the Scots Parliament he would not forget his affinity to the Ulster Scots. So long as the majority of citizens of Northern Ireland wished to remain citizens of the United Kingdom the UK would respect their will and defend their rights; not only that, under the Agreement so would the Republic and elements of the Republican movement.

The Irish Referendum Commission had outlined the case for a "No" vote in the Republic; one reason given was that partition was enshrined in the Irish Constitution and the claim to Northern Ireland was surrendered. In voting "No", those who advocated "no surrender" would be voting not to accept that surrender, which was perverse. The Commission's advertisement also said that the Irish Government's constitutional obligation to pursue unification would be removed. He asked whether Mr Bob McCartney MP wished to vote against that. The advertisement also stated that the Irish Government's acceptance of the Agreement would confer on the Unionists a veto over a united Ireland so long as they were in a majority in Northern Ireland; he wondered how Dr Paisley MP MEP could vote against that. He concurred with Mr McNamara that people in Britain would not understand how the Unionist community could take that line; and he earnestly hoped that he would wake up on May 23 to the unusual headline: "Ulster Says Yes"-which would be great news for Northern Ireland, the Republic and for the families of the British armed forces who had paid a terrible toll in doing so much to protect both communities.

Mr Caoimhghin Ó Caoláin (Cavan-Monaghan) supported the motion and commended those involved in the multi-party talks from which the document emerged. Sinn Féin was willing to work with the document, in co-operation with the

other political parties, to promote political progress based on equality and justice. Without fundamental change in the daily life of the people the concepts of equality and justice which underpinned the positive elements of the Good Friday document would have no meaning. The challenge was to bring about and manage the required change on issues like demilitarisation, political prisoners, the Irish language and the equality agenda. The promise of change in the Agreement needed to become the experience of reality. Sinn Féin's commitment was to play its part in creating that reality.

His party looked forward to working in harmony with others, especially the representatives of the Unionist community, in forging a new political unity of purpose in the community. In that regard he welcomed, as a first economic step, the financial package for the Six Counties announced on 12 May by the British Chancellor of the Exchequer. He expressed the hope that the package would make a start, reversing decades of discrimination and disadvantage and urged that the new measures should be equality tested. For example, businesses qualifying for new tax breaks should be required to fulfill rigorous examination of their fair employment record.

The economy of the Six Counties could not be developed in isolation. There must be a definite all-Ireland perspective. It was vital, therefore, that the Irish Government introduced, as soon as possible, a corresponding allocation of major funding for the entire Border region. This was essential for Counties Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Cavan, Monaghan and Louth in order to redress the severe disadvantage in those counties arising from 30 years of conflict and 78 years of partition. While verbal recognition has been given to the vital needs of the Border region, a policy framework and an economic basis for progress had yet to be put in place. This was not special pleading by Border Deputies but the expression of the requirement of a section of the population in the Republic most directly affected by the conflict and by the distortion of the economy in an area denied its natural market, natural potential and a level playing-field in the highly competitive play for inward investment.

Pointing to the need for major funding commitments, especially in the areas of education and transport infrastructure, the south mid-Ulster Border region had no third-level education institution. The roads network in those counties, especially in Counties Cavan and Monaghan, continued to diminish the quality of life for countless people, inhibiting progress and further burdening hard-pressed individuals and families.

He called on the Irish Government to begin the work of ending the inferior status of the Border region, to prioritise that policy as a central part of the peace process and to provide the funding action which would speak louder than words. Every Department must play its part. Underpinning that process was the responsibility of all Departments. He was happy to record his support for the Steering Committee's motion.

Mr Gerry Bermingham (St Helens South) described his late father telling him how, when he awoke on Easter Sunday 1916 in Harcourt Street, Dublin, his Easter egg was in pieces because a bullet had penetrated the window and broken it. He did not know whether it was an English or Irish bullet and he never found out; but he prayed that no child or grandchild of his would wake up in his bed on the island of Ireland to find his Easter egg broken. A "Yes" vote said that none would. A "No" vote would take people back, not to the *status quo*, but the violent and vicious past where people were killed and there was no hope.

The Agreement had been brokered by men of goodwill from all parties: did not the island and its electors have a duty to support goodwill? Nobody knew what the future held; but it would be a journey taken by the will of the many, not the dictates of the few. For that reason, there was a chance for peace which his ancestors would have given their right arms for and for which later generations of his family who live on this island and elsewhere had prayed. The chance for peace and for the future was in the hands of the electorate. He hoped that they would use it well.

RECENT POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS SUSPENSION

The Session was suspended at 10.55 am and resumed at 11.30 am with Mr David Winnick in the Chair.

The Chairman welcomed the Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr David Andrews TD. As a founder member of the Body he was no stranger to its deliberations. At its first meeting in London he had moved the motion which the Chairman had seconded. At a time when the Agreement had been negotiated and in the middle of the referendum campaign, Mr Winnick was especially pleased that one of the most senior Ministers in the Republic of Ireland was addressing the meeting.

Mr David Andrews TD, Minister for Foreign Affairs, spoke as follows:

Thank you, Co-Chairman. I appreciate your acknowledgement of my founding membership of this important Body. At that time we saw in it the ingredients of what it has now become - a very significant Body for an interchange of views between the British Houses of Parliament and our own Dáil and Seanad, our Oireachtas. It has been hugely successful in that regard.

It is good to see both Michael and David again. I know I have to be formal. The last time I addressed the chairman by his Christian name he reminded me that formality was the rule of the day and in the circumstances I had to address him as Co-Chairman.

Co-Chairman and fellow members, may I congratulate you on your initiative in arranging this special session of the Body at such a crucial time in the history of these islands. It is proper the Good Friday Agreement is given the widest possible consideration and the collective experience and wisdom of the members of this Body, of which I am proud to be a founding member. By virtue of your experience I

have no doubt you will give your deliberations that particularity of authority which is so necessary at this time.

A week from today the people of this island, North and South, will decide their future. Their choice is stark. Move forward in peace, partnerships and prosperity or stagnate in continued division, confrontation and negativity. Next Friday will be the first time since the general election of 1918 that the people of his island will have the chance to address together issues of fundamental national, all-island and all-Ireland importance.

This Agreement was negotiated by the political representatives of the vast majority of the people of Ireland, North and South. It is now up to those people to decide whether to accept or reject the Agreement. Echoing one of our most distinguished members, Seamus Mallon, it is for us in our own time to make our own history conscious of, but not paralysed by, memories of the past or visions of the future.

I pay tribute to Seamus Mallon because of all the negotiators he was one of the most able, if not indeed, the most able. I salute him and thank him in a personal way for his wisdom and guidance in the roller coaster that were the negotiations in Belfast. For that reason it is my hope the voters will turn out in massive numbers in both parts of Ireland.

The conflict in Northern Ireland has had a substantial social and economic cost for the South. It would be wrong for voters here to feel there is no reason for them to make a special effort to vote. Thirty years of violence, of appalling atrocities, of weeping loved ones, of grim scenes and faces are imprinted indelibly on all our memories. We have been moved by extraordinary expressions of courage and forgiveness and we now have the chance to speak together in the most powerful way imaginable - through the ballot box. We must grasp this opportunity to ensure by our votes that the strife ends now for all time. This will be the chance for the silent majority to make itself heard.

As politicians, our first duty is to the people we serve today. To be effective in this regard, we must adhere to the pledge given the opening declaration of the Agreement to work to ensure that ever provision of the Agreement is fully implemented when - I say when, not if - it is approved by the people. I believe this Agreement is a fair balance of the interests of all the people of these islands. All parties to this Agreement will recognise aspects which have specific appeal for their constituency. Likewise, all sides can point to aspects with which they have serious reservations and difficulties.

For many, the early release of prisoners is especially difficult and emotive. I understand this and have the deepest sympathy with those people who have been the victims of the last 30 years - 3,500 people dead, many thousands injured, some beyond repair both mentally and physically. I understand the victims of the violence in the context of their concern at the release of prisoners. At this time of hope when a bright future beckons it is proper to respect the suffering of these victims. Yet, as

politicians and leaders we must look at a broader picture. It is for us to do everything in our power to ensure that violence never again destroys families, friendships and community.

This is a unique Agreement. It was negotiated as a package and will stand or fall as a package. Each provision has a specific importance in its own right and as part of a carefully and delicately balanced totality. No individual or party can choose to support only those aspects of the Agreement which has a specific appeal for them. It is not an *à la carte* menu, it not to be selectively chosen; it is there as a totality.

The Agreement has within it the capacity to transform the core relationships in Northern Ireland, within the island of Ireland and between these islands. It provides both for stability and change, based on the consent of those governed by it. For many years Nationalists have, in varying degrees, withheld their active consent and support from the state. They have long sought fundamental change in the structure and ethos of Northern Ireland and the creation of new North-South structures to reflect their broader allegiance and allegiances. They palpably rejected the *status quo* but were effectively powerless to bring about the necessary changes. Now this desire for change is given substance throughout this Agreement.

Yet, Unionists ought not look upon change as a threat. There is now, for the first time, the prospect of a Northern Ireland in which both communities have a direct stake, where the failed strategy of dominance is replaced by inclusive partnership for the betterment of all. Change in this case must be seen rather as an opportunity and, we believe, grasped as such.

The new arrangements for the administration of Northern Ireland will enhance the fundamental rights and freedoms of all its peoples, regardless of political orientation or creed. In the same way enforcement of the law must be carried out fairly and impartially and must be seen to be done. In this manner the police service will earn the support and allegiance of the community as a whole, both in the interests of the people they serve and of the members of the police force themselves.

The new North/South Ministerial Council will provide a system for contact and exchange between both Administrations over the entire range of issues involved and will seek to promote the practical and mutual advantage of both parts of this island. It will operate by agreement and be strictly accountable for all its actions.

The new British-Irish Council will also facilitate the expression of the sense of wider links throughout these islands and the Irish Government sees significant potential in the development of these connections for our shared advantage, particularly in the context of Welsh and Scottish devolution. We also look forward to the further development of inter-parliamentary arrangements as envisaged by the Agreement. Underpinning all these arrangements will be a comprehensive consensus on constitutional change recognising the legitimacy of the wishes of the majority of the people of Northern Ireland. By this, both communities can feel secure, knowing that their rights, interests and identities are firmly protected and that the new structures

can function only by agreement and on the basis of interdependence. The ground rules for a fair and mutual respectful society have been laid down and cannot be overridden.

The old ways have failed and now there is the chance for a fresh start. This new stability made possible by change and not excluding future agreed change will create a context in which people can by consensus, not by confrontation, and by working together on practical issues learn new habits of trust and co-operation without the fear of the imminent betrayal of some vital political and constitutional principle. Power shared in this context is not power lost but power gained. The willingness to acknowledge that Northern Ireland has a dual identity and to accept diversity displays not weakness but strength.

This Agreement would not have been reached without remarkable leadership and political courage, particularly as the Minister of State at the Northern Ireland Office, Mr Paul Murphy, MP, knows in those last days, weeks and hours. I extend my warm personal regards to Mr Murphy and welcome him to my city and this part of the island. I express my deep appreciation for the long hours of hard work that he and his Secretary of State put into the talks process. It is deeply appreciated. He devoted much time to it and it is fair to say that we became close friends over those six months. That friendship, closeness and wisdom is deeply appreciated.

This is a good Agreement and a fact which renders the campaigns of those opposed to it both sterile and negative. They have no plausible alternative to offer and take refuge in fantasies which attempt to disguise the fundamental defeatism of their position and their shameful abdication of political responsibility. I believe people will see through this disguise. The people will have the sense to see that it is only through co-operation and compromise that we can heal our divisions and transcend the bitter legacy of history.

Mr Michael O'Kennedy resumed the Chair.

The Chairman thanked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and called the Minister of State at the Northern Ireland Office, Mr Paul Murphy, MP. Mr Murphy had played a very significant part in the negotiations; and the Body was privileged to have two Ministers present who were at the centre of the historic negotiations.

Mr Paul Murphy MP, Minister of State at the Northern Ireland Office, spoke as follows:

I am delighted to be in Dublin and particularly to share a platform with the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Deputy David Andrews. He is right that over a period of a number of months we have been involved in negotiations together, sometimes deep into and through the night. One thing which characterises these negotiations since I was fortunate enough to be asked to take part in them is the ever closing good relationships that have built up and developed between our two Governments. I suspect they have never been closer because we have got the same aim in mind of

ensuring that peace and political stability comes particularly to Northern Ireland but to the whole of Ireland as well.

I am very pleased to be present in Dublin Castle. It was a very different meeting the last time I was here a number of weeks ago. I never thought then that we would actually achieve what was achieved so remarkably successfully. The achievement is especially due to those parties in Northern Ireland who between themselves forged the Agreement. David Andrews paid tribute to all those party leaders and delegations who were there much longer than I was. I was only there since the general election. People like David Trimble, John Hume, Séamus Mallon, John Alderdice and others were there for well over two years. We should also bear in mind that it was not until the very last weeks as opposed to months that proper negotiations in the way the Body and I would understand took place. There were many months of frustration before that. The help of the two Governments was vital, particularly the help of the two Prime Ministers, Tony Blair and Bertie Ahern in the last days of the negotiations. Like all of us, they stayed up through the night arguing detail and negotiating as they had to do before Good Friday arrived.

I pay tribute to the members of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body. Over the years the Body has increased and improved relations between our two Parliaments and therefore between our two countries and two peoples. It is important to emphasise this point too. I could be wrong but I think this is the first time that Irish and British Ministers have addressed the Body at the same meeting. The motion before the Body welcomes the Agreement reached in the multi-party negotiations. It congratulates those involved and looks forward to its endorsement by the people in Northern Ireland and the Republic in the referenda to be held next week and its successful implementation. I would hold up two hands in support and endorsement of that motion if I had a vote. However, the Body has all my support for that resolution.

The Agreement meant all those involved in it actually won. Most importantly, it is the people in Northern Ireland itself who are the winners. Some parts of the Agreement do not win favour with some of the participants and other parts with others. However, I echo the point made by David Andrews that the Agreement itself is a package. It can only be seen as a whole. Some people find difficulty with some of the constitutional aspects. Others find difficulty with the release of prisoners and the decommissioning aspects. All parts of it are vital to its success.

Senator George Mitchell and his two vice-chairmen did amazingly good work as independent chairmen of the talks. None of those three people were either Irish or British. They came from other countries and spent literally years of their lives engaged in sometimes terrible frustration. Yet, at the end of the day, they themselves played an enormously successful role in bringing about the Agreement. I remember Senator Mitchell saying, when he put what he called his synthesis paper to the parties, that he would have been worried if any one participant said they liked it all. He was right. It is by its very nature a compromise. That is what negotiations are all about. There would not have been any need for negotiations if we had all

agreed. We would not have been in those rooms day in day out, night in night out, unless there were compromises to be made.

As we are in Dublin, I pay tribute to those members of previous Irish Administrations for their work in the early parts of the talks, including John Bruton, Dick Spring and others. I also pay tribute to members of what is now the Opposition in my country, including John Major, Patrick Mayhew, all the other statesmen and politicians in the United Kingdom and my predecessor, Michael Ancram. They were all delighted when finally agreement was reached.

Our highest priority has been to secure a lasting peace which is underpinned by a broadly acceptable political settlement. However, that is not just a Government responsibility. A peaceful society is dependent on all the groups in that society and the people they represent. The Agreement is unique in that for the first time all sides have agreed a way forward that respects both traditions' aspirations as well as addressing their fundamental concerns. Two elements underpin that agreement. The first, which is vital and to which all parties have signed up, is the principle of consent. At the end of the day the people in a democratic way in Northern Ireland will decide their future for themselves. It may be that their future will be in a united Ireland. At the moment they believe their future lies with the United Kingdom, but it is for them to decide that in a democratic way.

The second major element which underpins the Agreement is the principle of fairness and equity, acknowledging that establishing an assembly in Northern Ireland is fundamentally different from establishing a parliament in Scotland or an assembly in my country, Wales, in the sense that there must be an absolute parity of esteem between communities in Northern Ireland. This involves those who regard themselves as Unionists, those who regard themselves as Nationalists and those who regard themselves as neither. We must above all else acknowledge that factor and that it has been, and still is to a certain extent, a deeply divided society. This applies to any institutions that might be established, whether it is an assembly which is based on consensus or a North-South Body which must accommodate the aspirations of Unionists and Nationalists together, whether it is the issue of prisoner releases or human rights, which is particularly important as far as parity of esteem is concerned, or the issues of an equality commission, a human rights commission, a bill of rights or an acknowledgement of the proper cultural richness and identity of both communities and others. All these issues are vital and why it makes this situation so different from parliaments in Scotland and Wales. We must be so careful about how we build up this Agreement.

We had referenda in Scotland and Wales and both countries said "Yes". The margin was a little higher in Scotland than in Wales but it was "Yes" nevertheless. The difference between Northern Ireland and Scotland and Wales is that much of what is to be legislated for by way of, for example, an assembly is already agreed by the parties themselves. This includes the way in which an Executive is made up, how there is a First Minister and a Deputy First Minister, how they vote in the assembly, what responsibilities the assembly will take over and how it relates to the North-

South Ministerial Council and what that institution involves. All these matters are in much greater detail than they were in the referenda that was put to the people of Wales and Scotland.

The important aspect of the Agreement in a constitutional sense is that it was worked out in reasonably fine detail among the parties themselves. The British and Irish Governments knew that, whatever we did, we could not impose an agreement upon the people of Northern Ireland. It had to be forged from the parties themselves who represent people in Northern Ireland. If, as I wish it to be the case, it will be politicians who are elected by the people of Northern Ireland who will run those services currently run by myself and my ministerial colleagues, then they themselves must decide how to work out their destiny and future. This, if anything, was the key to the success of their agreement after much pain in negotiations. Nevertheless, that is how these things occur.

I wish to refer to Strand Three of the Agreement and the British-Irish Council which some people call the Council of the Isles. We never went into much detail before but it is an enormously important aspect of the whole Agreement. It did not cause too much disagreement between parties and Governments when it was discussed because we saw eminent good sense. One aspect which strikes me dramatically about why a change occurred in the last few months of the talks is related to perhaps a wider and then more domestic angle.

On the wider front, the reality is that we are all members of the European Union. That Body is being enlarged as well as deepened. In the Republic of Ireland particularly, Europe is now a matter of life in a way it was not previously. Europe is becoming very much a Europe of the regions. On the domestic side, the other aspect is that in the United Kingdom as a consequence of my party's success in the general election, we saw that there was a major move in terms of constitutional change so that the *status quo* in Northern Ireland was an impossibility. There could not be a parliament in Scotland, an assembly in Wales, assemblies in London and also perhaps elsewhere in England without considering the possibility of an assembly in Belfast.

The Strand Three aspect of the Agreement, which involves all these new institutions and parliament, including the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands, is a particularly interesting and important development. People ask what will they do? One can take two aspects, the environment and transport. If one lives in Wales, Scotland, whatever part of Ireland or the Isle of Man, pollution, fishing and matters affecting the Irish Sea concerns all those bodies. In terms of transport and trans-European networks, if one travels from Dublin to Dun Laoghaire, across the channel to Holyhead in my country, down through Wales and England and on to the Continent, one will eventually deal not with a British administration in so far as transport is concerned but a Welsh administration. The Irish Government will relate to its Welsh counterpart. Similarly in the North, if one travels from Stranraer to Larne and down through Scotland, a Scottish administration will deal with these matters and not a British one. Another obvious example is the cultural links between all the countries

and the common purpose they will have with the enlargement of Europe. In relation to its negotiations in Brussels and Strasbourg, there will be a common interest between Cardiff, Edinburgh, Dublin and Belfast. I look forward to those sort of developments.

I am glad David Andrews referred to victims because, as the people who have watched developments this week are aware, we have announced in Northern Ireland the establishment of a Minister for victims, Mr Adam Ingram. This is together with the report of Sir Kenneth Bloomfield which acknowledged above all else, as the Agreement did, that victims in Northern Ireland are sometimes forgotten in a way they should never be forgotten. If we are, as the Agreement points out, to deal with the important issue of prisoners with all its safeguards, we must never forget the fact that there are literally thousands of people in families in Northern Ireland and in the Republic who have been affected by the Troubles over the last 30 years.

Having read Sir Kenneth Bloomfield's report, the point which struck me most forcibly as well as the excellent recommendations it made regarding counselling, practical measures and memorials was the sentence that he had never been personally moved so much in the months that he was the commissioner as he was during the interviews he held with the families and the women and men who have been affected so dramatically and desperately by the Troubles over 30 years, and of course he is right. To look at figures and to meet the people whom they represent are two different things. One talks to people who have lost their loved ones or are disabled or maimed. I do not refer to one side or the other because victims are victims; whether they are Catholic or Protestant, Unionist or Republican, they have all suffered for many years.

When thinking about the 3,500 who have perished over the years, I worked out how many people that would amount to proportionately in England, Scotland and Wales: over 100,000 people - or every man, woman in child in my constituency - would have been wiped out. Everyone of those 100,000 would have had families and friends who were affected by their deaths. In my experience during the last nine months, short though it has been, I have learnt that there is hardly a family who has been unaffected either emotionally or physically, by the events in what is a relatively small part of our planet. As the Agreement and the report both said, the true memorial to those victims is a lasting peace, which is what the referendums are about in a week's time.

The work of this Body has been excellent in building up trust, confidence and relations between the two parliaments, Governments and peoples. There is an awful lot more work to be done in the months and years ahead. I am not sure how the Body will organise itself if, as I believe, the Agreement is passed and we move into a new era. Strand Two refers to parliamentarians North and South meeting; Strand Three refers to parliamentarians from the new assemblies in Scotland and Wales meeting their counterparts in Dublin and Belfast. I do not underestimate the significance of meetings between parliamentarians from the national parliaments in Dublin and London. Members of the Body will have to work hard in the months

ahead to work out how they organise this Body and the others to be formed under the Agreement. All I will say is that nothing but good can come of it because what the Agreement has taught me is that there is nothing wrong and everything right with talking. People use the phrase "talking shops" but sometimes those can produce a revolution in how we govern ourselves and arrive at a new type of society. The fact that we talked for two and a half years has produced an Agreement; will, I hope, produce a "Yes" vote on the island of Ireland, both North and South, next Friday; and will, I hope, produce assembly elections which will enable people in Northern Ireland to govern themselves on issues which are important to everyone - health, schools, roads, transport, local government, the way they live their lives. As we move into the next century with these terrible things behind us, we should think of the future. There has never been an opportunity like this before and I am grateful to the Body for playing its part and for Mr Andrews and his Government for playing theirs in this monumental venture into new politics and a new era.

On behalf of the Body, the Co-Chairman, **Mr David Winnick** (Walsall North), thanked the two Ministers for their excellent contributions which outlined what the Agreement would mean in practice for the people of both countries, especially those in Northern Ireland.

The Chairman also thanked the Ministers and proposed the suspension of the meeting to arrange a photographic record of the event. This was agreed.

RECENT POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS FURTHER SUSPENSION

The Session was suspended at 12.05 pm, and resumed at 12.15 pm, with Mr David Winnick in the Chair.

Mr Brendan Smith (Cavan-Monaghan) welcomed the thought-provoking presentations by the two Ministers and congratulated the Governments and parties who participated in the multi-party talks leading to an Agreement which was fair, balanced and in which both traditions were winners. It was still necessary to put across the message that no-one was threatened by the Agreement, which offered the only hope of a bright future for the people of the island. Its basic theme was change, which was necessary because what has happened, especially since 1969, could not continue.

Apart from campaigning for a resounding "Yes" vote, they needed to plan for the immediate economic future. Northern Ireland had suffered an immense human and social tragedy and; economically, the six Northern counties and the six Southern Border counties had suffered immeasurable damage. The Southern Border counties had been generally free of violence but had paid a heavy price through lack of investment and the resultant high unemployment and emigration. The Body had carried out many studies into the economic downside of the political difficulties, which explored the potential for a better and more affluent Ireland when proper political structures, to which both communities could give allegiance, were established. All those studies were contingent on the cessation of violence.

The Border areas had been cut off from their natural hinterland but they were now optimistic about the prospect of a lasting peace. They also believed there should be an economic dividend from the peace in the form of increased outside investment. because the threat of violence could no longer scare away such investment. This should take the form of increased outside investment in all sectors of the economies, North and South. There was confidence that the threat of violence could no longer scare away investors from the north of the country or from the areas along its Border. Large-scale investment in the Border areas was a vital long-term element in the ongoing peace process. People needed to see that peace brought tangible benefits, apart from the very valuable and welcome absence of violence.

There were no losers in the proposed Agreement; there could only be winners. The same must apply with regard to economic results; and no region should fear losing out. The surest foundation for the long-term success of the valuable work which had been done and the valiant efforts of those involved would be the establishment of an equitable economic prosperity in which everybody was able to participate. People could not go back; they had to go forward. An early economic dividend was necessary. He hoped that the Body would renew its requests and pleas to both Governments, the EU and the international community- especially to the US-to help the twelve Northern counties to progress economically.

The Chairman welcomed the US Ambassador, Her Excellency Jean Kennedy-Smith. The Body appreciated the work which she and the US Administration had done in helping to bring about the settlement. Members would have the opportunity to meet her on a more informal basis at lunch.

Lord Blease expressed his warm support for the remarks made by Deputy Smith. He referred to the past work of the Body and its role for the future. The seeds of the Body were sown in 1980. Over the period of 15 years since its development, the Body could claim to have fostered and promoted understanding, friendship and active and constructive parliamentary co-operation between the UK Government and the Irish Government.

The Body influenced a range of developments in vital areas of human respect, dignity, and honourable participation in civil matters. That helped towards the building of a commitment to peace and democracy, which was important in building the common weal and the general prosperity people seek to establish throughout these islands. A better life for all had been to the forefront of the concerns of the Body.

He pointed out that previous members had contributed in a superb way to the development of the Body. The Body's office holders should be thanked and acknowledged, as should the small band of officials and staff, in the Parliaments of the UK and the Republic of Ireland, who over 15 years had given great commitment and worked on many issues, including relevant EU matters, to draw peoples together, both North and South, in a practical manner, doing the work of bridge-building and winning hearts and minds.

The Agreement opened a new political vista, first in the referendums, North and South, and second, with the election of the Northern Ireland Assembly on 25 June and the period that immediately followed. The functions of the new Assembly, set out in Strand Two, should be considered by the Body. There were some areas where the Body should tread carefully. The establishment of the North/South Ministerial Council would create challenges.

He praised the work of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Dr. Mo Mowlam. He referred to her statement of 20 April when she said that, following the elections to the Assembly, the North/South Ministerial Council would operate in shadow mode, subject to necessary implementation legislation.

Mr Austin Currie (Dublin West) said that the decision to be taken on Friday 22 May was likely to be the most important in our history. A "Yes" vote in the North, the South and the island as a whole would give to the new institutions created by the Agreement an authority, both political and moral, greater than any institutions on the island had ever received before - greater than institutions created in 1920 and 1921 and the Constitution of 1937, which was carried by a small majority in the South and on which Northerners were not consulted. That was why a maximum "Yes" vote was so important. It would also mean that there would be less likelihood of the new institutions being challenged by men of violence of either extreme.

Unionists did not appear to realise the extent to which this would help them. The new authority for the new institutions in the North would be of tremendous assistance to them, unlike the weak institutions of the past. It would also guarantee the position of the Unionist tradition into the future.

It was unfortunate that the "Yes" campaign appeared to be in some trouble in the North. He suggested that Mr Stott should help some of the Unionists rather than Mr John Hume in Derry. A small "Yes" vote could have serious repercussions for the elections to the Assembly and the workability of those institutions in the future.

He had visited Northern Ireland on the previous weekend and the previous Monday. He had warned the Taoiseach in the Dáil of the negative effect of the triumphalism at the Sinn Féin Ard Fheis. People in the Republic did not fully appreciate its negative effects on Unionist opinion in Northern Ireland and on a section of Nationalist opinion. The scenes at the Ard Fheis had been widely shown on Ulster TV, to a greater extent than on RTÉ. He asked people in the Nationalist tradition to remember how they felt when they saw the triumphalism involving Dr Paisley and Mr Trimble together on the Garvaghy Road. The circumstances surrounding the appearance of convicted murderers magnified such triumphalism. It did a lot of harm. The Agreement was complex; and when people were confused they tended to believe the so-called evidence of their own eyes. Such acts on television might have a greater effect than normal.

All thoughts should be concentrated on how the largest "Yes" vote in Northern Ireland could be obtained and how the Unionists could be helped to achieve that.

There was an obligation on those in the Republican movement who caused the most serious harm through their display of triumphalism to help redress it. Much had been heard of confidence-building measures; however, confidence-building was a two-way process. In that regard it was regrettable that Mr Ó Caoláin had not been more helpful in his contribution-he could have been more constructive.

Decommissioning was a voluntary exercise because it would not occur in any other way. The Republican movement could contribute very successfully to the success of a "Yes" vote in Northern Ireland by making a strong statement on that matter. It would make a considerable contribution to the "Yes" vote that was essential among the Unionist community in Northern Ireland.

Mr David Wilshire (Spelthorne) apologised for his late arrival. It was not a political statement but due to trouble on the trains. He also apologised in advance for his absence later in the afternoon. It would not be a political statement but was due to his attendance at an unavoidable constituency advice surgery.

He had travelled to Dublin direct from Belfast to give his personal views. He was not a spokesman for anyone else and was there to speak for what he believed in, however unpopular it made him; to speak up for his fellow countrymen, because they were under threat; to speak up for democracy, because it was not democratic to allow oneself to be shot or bombed out of one's country. Above all, he was there to speak up for peace because he also wanted peace and an agreement. However, this so-called peace process and one sided sellout had not brought peace, nor would it.

He opposed the Agreement because it was based on a Green agenda. It was an irreversible route to a united Ireland. It was an attempt to appease armed terrorists. People should not take his word for it but listen to Sinn Féin/IRA, who were celebrating victory. They welcomed this deal not as a final settlement, but as step towards their final goal.

A majority of Unionists would vote "No". They could not accept abandonment of the Union. The Agreement swept away the Act of Union 1801, and the Government of Ireland Act 1920. Nor could they accept the continuing claim by the Republic to the people of Northern Ireland. The proposed amendments to the Republic's Constitution were only alterations; they did not cancel the claim.

Unionists could not accept the refusal to require decommissioning. Not one single bullet nor one ounce of Semtex had been handed over, nor would they be. Nor could they accept the release of murderers or bombers. These people were not prisoners of war but evil killers.

Pointing out that Unionists could not accept the destruction of the RUC, he told the Body that 299 officers had laid down their lives for peace. The Agreement was an insult to their memory. Nor could they accept the proposed Assembly because it put

armed terrorists into Government. Nor could they accept the proposed North/South Body because it was an embryonic all-Ireland Government.

It was a monstrous slur to accuse those who opposed the Agreement as not wanting peace. He was saying "No" because he longed for peace. It was a red herring to ask for alternatives. The referendum was not about this or that agreement; it is about the present Agreement, "Yes" or "No". It was dishonest to claim it could be adapted or adjusted to reassure doubters. It was an all party deal. He referred to the remarks of Mr Seamus Mallon MP on radio that morning, who said that the Agreement could not and would not be changed.

The Agreement was not just flawed, but rotten to the core. It would not bring peace. It was the death warrant of the Union. He hoped and prayed that next week Unionists would vote "No". He thanked the Body for letting him have his say, listening to him politely and trying to understand there was an alternative view.

The Chairman said that as parliamentarians, Mr Wilshire included, members of the Body always listened. It was the tradition of the two sovereign Parliaments always to listen to views which might not be one's own. That was also the tradition of democracy.

Mr Seymour Crawford (Cavan-Monaghan) thanked the Co-Chairman and his colleagues for making the meeting of the Body possible. It was important to face reality. The Agreement was a compromise which allowed for consent from all sides. There would be pain and gain and it was only the beginning of a long, slow process.

He was disappointed with Mr Wilshire's comments. He lived just a few miles from the Border and like many colleagues in his constituency he had had to bear the brunt of losing friends and relations over 30 years of violence. While the Agreement did not contain everything that everyone wanted, it had received much support from all the major political parties within this island. Other speakers had named those who played a major role in the Agreement. All the parties in the two Governments participated.

He expressed concern about the recent triumphalism in some quarters. They should think of the alternatives if there was not a reasonable "Yes" vote North of the Border. There was no doubt there would be an overwhelming "Yes" vote in the South. However, following events of the previous week, the Unionist vote in favour had dropped significantly. This was not difficult to understand because the leaders of Sinn Féin said they had to be devious, accept the parts of the Agreement which suited them and not take it as an end in itself.

It must be realised that people had had the opportunity to negotiate and he begged the extreme Nationalist and Unionist communities to clearly indicate that the war was over and that the bombs and bullets still in store would not be used in the future. They should clearly state that there could and would be decommissioning in the near future.

He agreed with his colleagues from the Border region about the need for both practical and economic support for the area. The Body and its committee structure had highlighted that need. The two Governments must act together with international forces to ensure there was economic benefit as a result of the Agreement. He welcomed the Agreement and asked for total support for it throughout the island. A good "Yes" vote was vital to ensure that the Agreement worked in the long term.

Mr Peter Brooke (Cities of London and Westminster) said that his family had lived in County Cavan for 150 years in the 17th and 18th centuries and it was therefore a particular pleasure for him to speak following a Deputy for County Cavan. He had enthusiasm for the first part of the motion which welcomed the historic Agreement and congratulated all the participants in the talks. Whatever view one took of the detail of the Agreement, it would be perverse not to rejoice at the fact it was reached or to salute those who reached it. This included the two Governments.

He had an Anglican background derived in equal parts from the Church of England, the Church of Ireland and the Church in Wales. His mother taught him the injunction "man look not back at the furrow ploughed by thee", which had been good counsel for him down the years. Therefore, it would be equally perverse for him, as somebody who had spent years of his life helping to roll the pitch for the process and thus inevitably living dangerously, not to express intense pleasure that the road had reached this conclusion. The Agreement was a great achievement and those involved one way or another over the years had perhaps a greater continuing faith than most of the media.

He was less easy about the second part of the motion. If there was endorsement in the referenda the following week and successful implementation thereafter, they were things to which one could look forward. However, looking forward, although positive, was a bland and passive process which implied that those things would happen of their own accord rather than things which would require the same commitment, endeavour, perspiration and courage which led to the Agreement itself.

It was hazardous for bystanders to substitute their own judgment for the judgment of those more directly involved. However, after all these years there was so much at stake that it would be irresponsible to remain entirely silent if one had a point of view. He was uneasy but was not seeking to kick back into life the embers of past events which were best regarded as belonging to the furrow behind us. Much of what was said by the principal leaders in these matters was directed at their supporters and not their opponents. People behaved in the way they were treated and stereotypes were best banished from one's mind. Beyond those admirable aspirations which elevated the human condition, he urged all concerned, particularly the two Governments, not to suspend their critical faculties and ultimate sense of reality. Everybody involved had to remember the effect of their words and actions within the ordinary rules of political engagement-not only on their supporters but also on their opponents.

Senator Paschal Mooney said that he was honoured to follow Mr Brooke, and complimented him for initiating the peace process. Sometimes his former role as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland was not highlighted enough, but it had never been undervalued or diminished. He had always admired the strong liberal tradition exemplified by Mr Brooke and many other members of the Body who had taken a proactive interest in Ireland.

In common with his colleagues from Border counties, he strongly supported the Agreement and wished for peace. The miserly and bitter contribution of Mr Wilshire should be cast into the political wilderness. It was precisely that type of attitude which created the difficulties for many in Northern Ireland. If any message went from the Body, it should be directed to those in Northern Ireland who appeared to be wobbling somewhat in their commitment to the Agreement, that they should hold their nerve and not allow themselves be redirected into a political *cul de sac* with political dinosaurs.

He was sure that Mr Wilshire and those he represented would not wish to be identified with the likes of the Revd Ian Paisley, who wore a clerical collar and who had said that the Bible was his guiding rule in life but who, in referring to the medical condition of the Secretary of State, called her an "Arab with a turban" and described the Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs as "a long drink of water". He asked if that was the type of rhetoric the people of Northern Ireland wished to follow; they had followed it for 30 years and it had led them nowhere.

The Agreement had been reached on the basis of consensus. The release of prisoners had always been central to the resolution of any conflict. Following the 1956-62 campaign along the Border, the Unionist Government had released several hundred prisoners on one day. Over 200 prisoners serving life sentences had been released and paroled in Northern Ireland. However, that point was not intended to diminish the pain, hurt and anguish involved. He recalled the brave young man from the Shankill who had lost his wife and who was rearing a young daughter and who was strongly in favour of a "Yes" vote. If that man had the compassion and forgiveness to ask his fellow countrymen to vote "Yes", who were they to question the position?

He was reminded of the "winds of change" speech about Africa made by the former British Prime Minister and leader of the Conservative Party, the late Lord Macmillan. He wondered if, had Mr Wilshire been in charge at that time, there would have been any progress in Aden, Cyprus, Hong Kong, Palestine, Malaysia, Kenya, Rhodesia and South Africa. They all had revolutionary struggles and so-called terrorists who negotiated with successive British Governments. They were all now treated as statesmen. People should look to the future and forget the past.

Lord Rathcavan supported the motion and said that every reasonable person hoped for an overwhelming endorsement of the Agreement in Northern Ireland. However, if that endorsement was to succeed and make the process work, a majority of 70 per cent was needed because a lesser majority could be interpreted as a majority of the

Unionists saying "No", and that would cause grave problems to the subsequent implementation of the Agreement.

Reasonable thoughts and political logic had been overwhelmed by emotion and prejudice. He believed, as David Trimble had stated, that the Agreement could strengthen the Union. However, it was also seen by many as a "Green" document rather than as a balanced package, and that had highlighted emotions, prejudices and fears. He knew people who had never before been politically aware but had become incensed by the prisoner issue and concerned about the future of the RUC and the absence of clearer commitments on decommissioning. He hoped that the British Prime Minister's reassurances would be heard and understood and that the depressing opinion poll in *The Irish Times* was a passing phase.

People considering voting "No" were hopelessly blinkered to the economic opportunities which the Agreement opened up for the next generation. A negative vote said "No" to new inward investment, new jobs and all the new economic opportunities which would present themselves and which were desperately needed to cement peace in a Northern Ireland which had fallen behind on the economic matrix, particularly in the Border regions. Unfortunately, despite the overwhelming economic arguments, there had been a notable lack of leadership from the business community. The Chamber of Commerce in the North, by far the largest business representative organisation, still had not come out in favour of the Agreement and it was time they stopped sitting on their hands. It was said of a famous Member of the House of Lords that he sat on the fence so long that the iron entered his soul; there was a danger of that happening to many in Northern Ireland who ought to be identified with the "Yes" campaign.

He had spent several happy years working in Dublin and his job took him to almost every corner of all 32 counties. He had the opportunity in recent years to work at a high level of cross-Border co-operation to develop an all-Ireland tourism industry. He found Mr Wilshire's arguments intellectually flawed. The Agreement offered enormous opportunities to make economic and political progress and to achieve better democratic government in Northern Ireland. In the referenda, people would cast probably the most important vote of their lives. He hoped that by polling day the message would have got through that there was no alternative to a "Yes" vote and the lasting peace it could bring.

Mr Conor Lenihan (Dublin South-West) said that Mr Wilshire's contribution had been a welcome and timely reminder of the frailties, fears and paranoia entertained by some Unionists on the islands of Ireland and Britain-and that the Body must listen to those views. So much of Ireland's story had been locked in by an obsession with history and bravely worded documents such as the Proclamation of 1916 and the Ulster Covenant, which had sprung from two different traditions engaged in sterile conflict. The Agreement was a historic landmark where the sterile conflicts could be put aside. For too long Ireland had been hemmed in by its history and as the poet Yeats had written: "Too long a sacrifice makes a stone of the heart". It was proper

and poignant for members to consider those words and think carefully about the words they used.

Quoting the Irish poet Richard Murphy who described the Orange march phenomenon on 12 July as "bygone canon, bygone spleen", he hoped that this would be increasingly the case in 1998 as people moved into the future. The Body should support the proposal that the Battle of the Boyne site, located south of the Border, be opened up to the Orange Order and other institutions who wished to parade and celebrate their Unionism. This would be a spontaneous and generous gift from one people to another with no obligations and ties. This type of move had to be made and accepted. People had to reach over to the other side, put conflict behind them and move forward into the future.

He issued a challenge to Mr Wilshire and other Unionists who opposed the Agreement to respect and obey the letter and spirit of the Agreement if it was passed. People needed to hear their answer and whether they would respect and honour the people's choice when it was made positively on 22 May. He quoted a phrase often used to justify purges: *salus populi suprema lex esto* - "let the welfare of the people be the supreme law". The saving of human lives must be put first. The voice of the Irish people must be listened to, heard and acted upon, respected and obeyed. If the people voted for the Agreement, it must be honoured in full without equivocation or qualification.

He concurred with the words of James Connolly that Ireland without its people meant nothing to him. Faith in the people was a prerequisite of involvement in democratic politics. The Body was about faith in the people; the members were all elected representatives with a mandate. There would be a positive vote and a mandate for change after 22 May and the Body must keep that faith.

Lord Holme of Cheltenham raised a point of order. In light of the overwhelming mood of the meeting and the fact that the intervention by Mr Wilshire was likely to make the television coverage, he asked if it was possible to hold the vote on the motion at an early point. It was important that everyone had an opportunity to speak but he was concerned that the impression might be given that the Wilshire view was the predominant one.

The Chairman said that there were difficulties in taking a vote before everyone who wanted to speak could be called, as a vote was normally called at the end of a debate. However, a number of colleagues might have left before the vote was taken, so he asked members to allow the two Co-Chairmen to ponder the matter during lunch.

The Co-Chairman, Mr Michael O'Kennedy (Tipperary North) said that the Co-Chairmen were conscious of the suggestion and anxious to have the maximum presence for the vote.

Ms Maria Fyfe (Glasgow Maryhill) said not only was it essential to follow the proposal but to do so with maximum speed because news bulletins were being broadcast concurrent with the present discussion.

Mr Austin Currie (Dublin West) supported that view. The Body has listened to Mr Wilshire as it listened to everyone else, irrespective of his or her view, but Mr Currie objected to people who "blew in, blew off and blew out" without listening to anyone else.

The Chairman said that he and his Co-Chairman would discuss over lunch how to hold a vote while all colleagues were present.

The Session was suspended at 1 pm and resumed in public at 2.40 pm, with Mr Michael O'Kennedy in the Chair.

The Chairman said that he and his Co-Chairman had been asked to allow the Body to deal with the motion on a substantive basis now and to allow Members to continue to speak on the issue on the Motion for the Adjournment; and this they now proposed to do.

Motion made, and Question proposed:

That the question now be put.-(**Mr Michael Mates**):

Mr Michael Mates (Hampshire East), moving the motion, said that this was not a device to stop anyone from speaking but since the Body had gathered expressly and extraordinarily to transmit a view to those considering how to vote next week, there should be a proper representation of members when the Body's vote was taken. His second proposal was to move the Adjournment, on which members would be free to continue to debate the matter, as was the practice in both the House of Commons and the Dáil.

Mr Wilshire had addressed the Body and, as always, his dissenting views were heard politely and punctiliously. He had said that he was speaking for himself, which should be emphasised because the media had latched on to the only voice of dissent at the Body. Mr Mates said Mr Wilshire was speaking neither for his party, nor for any of its members in the House of Commons, nor for the mainstream Unionist position. Mr Wilshire was entitled to his view but it should be understood that if the two Ministers, Mr Peter Brooke, and all those involved in the talks in both countries could find it in their hearts to sign up to the Agreement, no matter what reservations they had about various aspects of it, such opposition as Mr Wilshire expressed was personal and went little further than that. Surely if Mr Trimble could go as far as he did the Body ought to be able to put this into perspective. He did not want to raise the temperature but if he had left these remarks unsaid it would not have been fair to the vast number of people whose only aim was to make peace work.

And the Question being put, That the Question be now put:-It was agreed to.

And the Main Question being put accordingly;

The Body divided: Ayes, 26: Noes, 1 (*Mr David Wiltshire dissenting*).

So the Question was agreed to.

Resolved, That the Body, recalling the unanimous approval of its motion on the multi-party talks at its recent 15th Plenary Session in Ballyconnell, Co. Cavan, welcomes the historic Agreement reached in the multi-party negotiations, congratulates all the participants in the talks on reaching agreement, and looks forward to its endorsement by the people in the referenda, North and South, and to its successful implementation.

The Chairman thanked the Body for agreeing to the closure to allow colleagues who had to leave early to vote while allowing debate on the matter to continue on the Motion for the Adjournment.

On a point of clarification, **Mr Roger Stott** asked whether the news that the motion had been overwhelmingly carried by the Body would be communicated to the Governments.

The Chairman said that information would be communicated to the Government and the public at the conclusion of business. The Government had recognised the significance of the Body in sending senior Ministers to address it, which obliged it to communicate to them the conclusion of the meeting.

7. ADJOURNMENT

Motion made, and Question proposed:

That the Body do now adjourn.-(**Mr Michael Mates**)

Mr John Austin (Erith and Thamesmead) said that while it was true, as Lord Merlyn-Rees had said, that people in Great Britain could not understand what people had to live through, his Irish constituents had shared the pain and suffering. He represented the constituency of Woolwich which had seen the King's Arms and barracks explosions, and he had represented service men and women who also shared the pain and suffering, as Mr Stott had pointed out. We now had an Agreement which had been thought impossible to achieve a year or six months ago. Everyone had reservations but it had received the endorsement of both Mr David Trimble and Mr Gerry Adams and provided the prospect for peace and progress. The intransigence expressed by Mr Wilshire had been an obstacle to peace for many years. Some people had tried to unpick parts of the Agreement but it must be taken as a whole because otherwise the process would unravel. That is why there should be a resounding "Yes" in the referendum.

Like Mr Wilshire, he had come from Belfast and what he had seen was different from what he had seen two years, four years or 20 years ago. There were the beginnings of hope, of the re-establishment of normal life, and of re-investment. As Mr Brendan

Smith had said, there would be serious economic consequences for the whole of Ireland and for both jurisdictions if there was not a resounding "Yes" vote, for who would provide inward investment if there was a "No" vote? Mr Wilshire said that he did not have to provide an alternative; but if there was a "No" vote we would return not to the *status quo* but to the Dark Ages.

The Agreement was an opportunity to transform Northern Ireland by guaranteeing basic human and civil rights under the agenda put forward by the Minister of State, Mr Murphy. There was for the first time the possibility of policing and government by consent, and of real democracy. The only people who stood in the way were those like Mr Wilshire who said "No" to the Agreement.

Mr Brian O'Shea (Waterford) said that the Agreement afforded an opportunity for conflict resolution on the island. Earlier in 1998 he had asked foreign students in the Irish School of Ecumenics why they had come to Ireland and what they had learned; one American student had said that the elements of the conflict were inside all of us, and we had to resolve that conflict before we were equipped to make a contribution to conflict resolution. Neither emotive language nor triumphalism helped the process of resolution. If those who had been involved in violence felt remorse they had a responsibility to say unequivocally that they were sorry, in order to contribute to the process of healing, forgiveness and reconciliation.

The number of people exercising their franchise was diminishing, so everyone had to seek the largest possible poll to make clear that people on both sides of the Border were giving consent to the democratic process. He was committed to the Agreement and hoped for an overwhelming majority in favour in both parts of the country. It was an honourable compromise and the real work would start after the vote. An opening of minds and hearts was needed. He believed that it was possible to push the bomb and the bullet out of Irish politics forever, and for the whole island to live in peace and partnership with respect for one another.

Mr Joe Benton (Bootle) referred to Mr McNamara's remarks about the reaction of those outside Ireland to a "No" vote. As the only representative from Merseyside - an area with many Irish residents and with historic links with Ireland - he said that a "No" vote or a derisory "Yes" vote would hurt anyone in the area with a deep love of Ireland. He wished the "Yes" campaign every success as an historic opportunity. Confucius had said that every long journey must have a first step and next week's vote could provide that, given the tolerance which had been shown to date. He expressed the sincere thanks of everyone on Merseyside for the superhuman efforts involved in bringing people thus far.

Mr David Winnick took the Chair as Chairman.

Mr Séamus Kirk (Louth) was grateful for the opportunity provided by the Body's meeting to express support for the Agreement. He hoped that the referenda would be carried North and South - a negative result could not be contemplated because it would plunge everyone into a crisis. The path to the Agreement was long and

tortuous; and those who were present at the end appreciated the groundwork laid down through the years. However, success in the referenda was only the beginning: building bridges between the communities would take time, but it would happen eventually if the Agreement was passed.

Speakers from Border constituencies had mentioned the need for an economic strategy to develop those areas. As a representative for Louth he could not overstate the importance of developing the six Southern Border counties in tandem with the Northern counties. The area had been "peripheral", as was the common terminology at EU level. It was especially relevant for a range of familiar reasons. Economic development had not materialised, which was important to bear in mind at a time when funds from different sources might be available.

The meeting afforded some of the principal involved in the Agreement an opportunity to address the Body and members had been impressed with their contributions. The importance of measured public utterances between now and polling day could not be overemphasised. The use of dangerous and emotive language could have a catastrophic impact on the voting intentions of people, especially those in the North. Any contributions should be measured and should take account of the sensitivities involved. He hoped for a successful outcome.

Mr William O'Brien (Normanton) said that he had listened with interest to the contributions. He had arrived on the previous day as part of a visit to St. Michael's Primary School, Inchicore, and Dublin High School. Previously he had visited schools in Belfast. He saw children who needed a chance and who look forward to a future different from the future their parents faced. The Agreement offered such a future. It was sad that Mr Wilshire had not been with him at the primary school in Inchicore because all members of the delegation were touched by the work of the teachers and the atmosphere under which the children were taught. A "No" vote would amount to walking away from these children, both North and South.

The Agreement contained some very good points, for example, on human rights. Those children were entitled to the human rights of free political thought, freedom and expression of religion, the right to see constitutional change by peaceful and legitimate means, the right to freedom of choice with regard to place of residence, the right to equal opportunity in all social and economic activity regardless of class, creed, disability, gender or ethnic origin, and the right to freedom from sectarian harassment. That was what the Agreement offered.

While his future was now behind him, the future of those children was in front of them. Anyone with a sense of the milk of human kindness must favour a "Yes" vote. He described how an 11 year old child in a classroom went to shake his hand and other children followed suit. They wanted to be friendly and wanted us to do something for their future. If the philosophy of Mr Wilshire and the *status quo* were followed it would not offer them a future. The decision to support a "Yes" vote was correct; and the Body could not turn its back on the children of Ireland.

The Agreement contained a strategy to develop Northern Ireland's economically and socially, along the lines of a regional development agency. He had fought for this in the Yorkshire and Humberside region, as had Mr Wilshire for his own constituency. Why should it be argued that the people of Northern Ireland should not have that same right? In this light, he asked Mr Wilshire to campaign to secure a "Yes" vote to give these children an opportunity and to give economic development in Northern Ireland the same chance as in other regions of the UK.

Senator Helen Keogh said that people on the island would make history when they voted on the Agreement. It must be a resounding "Yes", both North and South. It was inconceivable that eligible voters would not exercise their franchise. People in the Republic of Ireland must show solidarity with their neighbours in the Northern Ireland who had to endure so many years of conflict.

Initially, the conventional wisdom was that constitutional and institutional issues would dominate the campaign. But this had not happened: the debate had concentrated more on human issues. The controversial issue of prisoner release, the decommissioning of paramilitary arsenals, the poignant issue of locating the missing bodies of victims of violence and acknowledging the hurt and trauma of the victims had taken centre stage because those who spent all their lives abiding by the law felt uncomfortable at the prospect of people convicted of terrible crimes being set free.

Those who believed that the conflict was over were puzzled at the refusal of paramilitaries to decommission their weapons of destruction. The relatives of victims of violence, whose bodies had never been recovered, looked to the Republican movement to take them out of their years of misery and allow them conduct a proper Christian burial.

While there were many unpalatable aspects to the Agreement, it nevertheless provided a historic opportunity to establish a permanent peace and a new political order. Democratic politicians had taken a leap of faith and she asked the Republican movement especially to give a tangible display of good faith in return by helping to locate bodies which had never been recovered and stating that the conflict was over.

Both Governments had to proceed with the utmost sensitivity on prisoner releases. The Agreement was clear that decommissioning must take place; it was not an optional extra. Efforts must be redoubled to ensure the Agreement was passed because the alternative was almost too horrible to contemplate. Those voting "No" should realise that this only gave encouragement to groups who saw democratic politics as unnecessarily restrictive and who believed the gun and bomb were more effective tools in achieving their goals.

The Agreement offered a firm foundation for the future. The vote would only be a staging post; the next task would be elections to the Assembly when more obstacles would emerge. Nevertheless, she was heartened by the support expressed by members of the Body, bar one. Given this, she was convinced of success, which was

essential. It was important to hold the highest democratic ideals in all future activities.

Mr Michael O'Kennedy resumed the Chair.

Lord Glentoran said that he was happy and honoured to have the opportunity to speak on this, his first outing with the Body. He supported the motion although, like others, there were many aspects of the Agreement he did not like. Deciding to vote "Yes" was not easy - it took thought and soul-searching - but the consequence of a "No" vote was no hope. The only future for the people of Northern Ireland, where he lived, was a "Yes" vote.

He understood the fears and doubts of Unionists and hoped people would not be too intolerant of those doubts. There was a strong contingent of Unionists who, rightly or wrongly, believed that for 30 years they had been badly treated by Westminster, Dublin and Washington. Members of the Body might not like to hear that said but they knew it that this was what the Unionists genuinely felt. While he disagreed with their viewpoint he accepted its reality. It would take great courage by many Unionist people in the North to vote "Yes", but he believed and hoped that it would happen in large numbers. However, he was disappointed that a number of the leaders of the Ulster Unionist Party, some of whom he knew personally and well, had failed their electorate in their time of need by not having the courage to persuade people that this was only the first stage and in order to keep going a "Yes" vote was required.

The battle had not yet begun; there would be a job to do after a "Yes" vote. Ministers and all involved in the creation of the Agreement had taken a huge quantum leap and a big chance. If the vote was not within what people reasonably expected, the work of everyone involved could be lost in the elections to the Assembly, when the real game plan would commence. It was vital, therefore, that the population of Northern Ireland, especially the Ulster Unionist population, understood that they were voting to accept all the opportunities highlighted by other speakers, especially Mr Home Robertson, who had read out the advertisement placed by those promoting a "No" vote in the Republic of Ireland. He had pressed the British Government to ensure that there was proper communication to allow the Unionist population to make a decision and to have every opportunity to take the courageous step of voting "Yes".

The Chairman thanked Lord Glentoran for his first contribution to the Body and welcomed his positive message.

Mr John Ellis (Sligo-Leitrim) said that the meeting had been useful in showing where members stood on the Agreement. It provided the Body with the opportunity to express its appreciation to all those involved in the process, including the two Governments. The options after the vote were stark, from both a Northern and Southern perspective.

Living in a Border county, he had seen the ravages, strife, hardship and sadness emanating from the conflict. He knew families who were affected and who had seen some of their loved ones, both Nationalists and Unionists, taken away long before their time. Looking back to 1969, when he left school, he described how, ten miles from his home, there was continual strife, bitterness and anger, vented by means of the bomb and the bullet. It had served no purpose, nor would it for the future. Violence was an end to nothing and would only breed more violence.

He had no doubt there would be an overwhelming "Yes" vote in the South, because people did not want to see the continuance of funeral processions and paramilitary trappings on their televisions. However, people also wanted equal treatment for all after the vote. The Agreement presented the first opportunity for all to become equal on the political stage and it should be grasped.

He agreed with earlier speakers that there was too much soft sell in the "Yes" campaign in Northern Ireland. It was time to explain to the Northern electorate that it had the choice of voting "Yes", which he hoped would lead to peace, stability and industrial development, or "No", which would be a vote for a continuation of the past 30 years. While large amounts of money had been pumped into Northern Ireland in the past few years, with the promise of more in the future, it was a pity that there had not been the same level of investment throughout the past 30 years, as it might have led to more employment. Unemployment in ghetto areas led to undesirable activities which were not in the best interests of any of the communities involved.

It was necessary to sympathise with the victims of the past 30 years. Many of those present knew some of them and had seen what they had been through. It would take bravery to forgive the atrocities that occurred on both sides. This was not an "us and them" situation, it concerned everyone.

The only question was whether politicians and those in power could get people to realise that the vote on the following Friday provided the opportunity for a new beginning in Northern Ireland, in which it would have the opportunity to govern itself, more or less, and people would have the right to make their own decisions.

The BSE crisis had caused major problems for the farming community in Northern Ireland. Given its coupling with the UK system it had suffered severely since 1996. Had BSE been treated on an All-Ireland basis, farmers in the North would have been better off. This might not have been the case for other groups in other circumstances.

It was necessary to ensure a resounding "Yes" vote. He agreed with Lord Glentoran that the elections to the Assembly would cause the biggest problems, when people would have to make unusual choices. When casting their first, second or third preference votes for their parties they must decide what party to support to ensure that the Assembly would work. It is the later preferences, down to the 15th in some

cases, that would decide who won the last or second last seat in many of the constituencies.

A resounding "Yes" vote, North and South, was vital. It was essential in the South because it would show people in the North that people in the Republic were confident that the Agreement could work. Following the vote all efforts must be made to ensure the candidates elected to the Assembly, Nationalist, Unionist or whatever persuasion, would work the Agreement and not wreck it.

Northern Ireland should be given the opportunity to provide a Government that would bring about peace and harmony. Investment had suffered as much in his area as in Northern Ireland. Following the "Yes" vote politicians must ensure that the Assembly was not wrecked by those with an agenda, such as Mr Wilshire and his friends. For the first time, that day members of the Body had seen a colleague wear an emblem displaying his views. It was more annoying that it was removed once the television cameras were taken from the room. It was a cynical operation.

Mr Michael Mates (Hampshire East) said that the emblem was not removed by the member in question because of television cameras but because he as the leader of his group had told him to take it off.

Mr John Ellis (Sligo-Leitrim) congratulated Mr Mates for doing so.

Mr Michael Mates (Hampshire East) said that much had been said on which almost all members were in agreement and he would not conclude in the usual way by commenting on the remarks made by so many colleagues. The Body was a worthwhile exercise, in which colleagues from both Parliaments had put aside prejudices they all held when it started eight years ago. Speaking as a founder member, he said that the coming together and understanding between the two Parliaments, brought about by the Body, was nothing short of remarkable. The message from the Body, albeit a little distorted, of total support for all the men and women of courage and vision who had brought about the Agreement had gone out.

Turning to the future, there were one or two difficult hurdles to overcome. He was disappointed that Mr Currie had been interrupted because of time constraints, because he was looking forward to the future and had other ideas he wished to share. He would have liked to have heard them, but doubtless there would be another opportunity.

The theme of looking forward, forgiving and in some cases apologising recurred through everyone's remarks. However, he was disappointed with the contribution of Mr Ó Caoláin in that there was no word about the future, no answer to the questions other members had been asking of Sinn Féin/IRA throughout the process - for example, about the bodies of the dead. He urged members to put that question on every conceivable public occasion until it was answered because it could not be avoided. It would be a humanitarian gesture. It applied not only to the bodies of people whose relatives live on the island of Ireland; bodies of British people also

remained unrecovered. The problem cut across the spectrum and needed answering because there was no conceivable reason why it should not be, except that someone within the Sinn Féin/IRA organisation did not want to.

Referring to Mr Lenihan's remark that the test of the Agreement would be the extent to which it was honoured, he said he hoped and believed in a "Yes" vote. This would pave the way for legislation, which would not be uncontroversial in Westminster, to establish the necessary arrangements for an Assembly and which would, and must, include the terms and conditions for the release of prisoners, for which primary legislation was required in the British jurisdiction - this might not be the case in the Republic of Ireland.

However, the Agreement had to be adhered to and the key was that everyone had to swallow something in the interest of making it. In this regard, the decommissioning of weapons would be the greatest difficulty. Sinn Féin/IRA, Mr Martin McGuinness and Mr Gerry Adams had said "not one bullet" would be decommissioned and the IRA had not gone away. He believed that the IRA had no intention of handing over its arms and understood the historical reasons for this. However, that refusal would put an intolerable strain on those within the leadership of the Ulster Unionist movement who had brought their people a long way to accommodate the Agreement. Foreseeing Sinn Féin winning enough seats and support in the Assembly elections to warrant a place or two on the Executive or Cabinet, he said that taking such places was conditional within the Agreement upon progress on decommissioning. At that point the party would say the problem of decommissioning was one for the IRA, not them. This would place the most intense strain on the moderate leadership of the Ulster Unionist movement. If people were not careful it would open the door to the extremists to say "I told you so".

Moderate Ulster Unionists leaders failed in the past because they went further than they could take their people - examples included Terence O'Neill and Brian Faulkner. He did not want that to happen to David Trimble because he had acted courageously and swallowed more than most.

The Body could act constructively for the future by insisting that the letter of the Agreement should be honoured by all. Otherwise, following the trauma of the referenda, the legislation, the elections and the establishment of the Assembly, a road-block would be put in place by the men of terror who never wanted the Agreement to work in the first place. People had to be clever, astute and politically sophisticated enough to find a way through; and to that end they must do so by standing firm on the Agreement, which had been achieved with such difficulty.

The Chairman thanked Mr Mates for a fitting conclusion to what had been, in every sense, an historic debate. In welcoming the Agreement the Body was, in its own way, creating history because this was the first time the elected representatives of both countries had had the opportunity to endorse an action of this kind. It was also the first time it had been able to signal its awareness of and concern about the problems faced by the community in Northern Ireland, and had they been here he felt sure

that they would have been reassured by the contributions. The Unionist community should be reassured by the understanding, consistently expressed by all sides in the Body, of their apprehensions, fear and even mistrust. There was also a readiness and determination to help them to release those fears and to let them know that the role that the Body wished them to play would be determined by themselves based on the principles of consent as set out in the Agreement. They had no need to fear anything expressed at the Plenary. The Body wanted to see an end to confrontation on the narrow ground that had been part of the tragic history of the North of Ireland and open up avenues, particularly for young people.

Everyone had been greatly touched by Senator George Mitchell's hope that the youngsters born in Northern Ireland on the same day as his infant son was born could look forward to the same prospects, security and happiness. That was the Body's challenge. Many representatives in both Governments and others had devoted much time over the years to the matter, and they would say it would be all worthwhile if, from all the difficulties encountered at various stages, a degree of consensus was reached based on the democratic choice and endorsement of the people.

He greatly welcomed the endorsement of the Agreement by the Body, albeit with one dissenting voice. The sole dissenting voice was perhaps a reminder that there were apprehensions, divisions and mistrust which the Body must continue to attempt to overcome. It would be another challenge for the Body as it faced the future. It was significant that members had commended the efforts and achievements of both Governments. The resolution would be passed on to the two Administrations. He complimented the Secretary of State, Dr Mowlam, and that said the Body appreciated her great contribution. She demonstrated the positive and dynamic role that women could play in the resolution of the problem.

Regarding the future of the Body, the Minister of State at the Northern Ireland Office, Mr Paul Murphy, MP, had signalled that what the Body had built must play an essential role in the future, irrespective of the institutional framework which followed. The Governments recognised the Body was a unique institution which could only make a positive contribution. The debate had demonstrated that the Body's thoughts were for the future, its concerns were for the suffering of the past and its sympathy for the victims. He wished that the people who inflicted the violence, hurt and trauma on so many had been present at the meeting to learn that it was important to express regret and apologise for the hurt suffered by so many.

The Steering Committee's decision to convene the special meeting had been fully vindicated by the debate. He was happy to have been involved in promoting the idea and he thanked all the members for what he was sure would be the beginning of further contributions to a positive outcome in the interests of harmony on the island and between the two islands.

The Co-Chairman, **Mr David Winnick**, thanked his colleague Michael O'Kennedy for co-chairing the meeting. It was not a secret that there had been reservations and

nervousness about holding it - some colleagues took the view that it could have the opposite effect on the referenda to that intended. However, the Body had demonstrated its maturity and despite members' differences on many matters it was able to debate an historic issue, so it had been justified in holding the special meeting.

Mr Winnick said his son would reach the age of 13 at the beginning of the new century. One hundred years ago Ireland dominated the political agenda in the United Kingdom and Ireland and continued to do so following World War I, World War II and the tragic events since 1970 because people were unable to resolve the issue of Northern Ireland. It would be marvellous if it was no longer an issue in the next century and if, despite all the problems which existed, there were no more terrorism, violence, knee-capping or inhumanity. He did not believe in triumphalism; but in this instance democracy had won. Those who set out to terrorise a community against the wishes of the majority, to bring about an objective which the majority did not want, did not succeed because politicians in the Republic and the United Kingdom made clear that terrorism would not triumph, and the Body could take consolation from that fact.

He agreed with his Co-Chairman that the Body hoped that the issue would be resolved to a large extent by resounding majorities in the referenda in Northern Ireland and the Republic. He hoped that those who opposed the Agreement would abide by the majority verdict because that was democracy.

He was pleased that the Body had held the special meeting despite its reservations. Lessons had been learned about how such meetings should be summoned and members could be satisfied that the Body had matured sufficiently to debate the subject without feeling that any side had been let down in any way.

And the Question being put :- It was agreed to.

Resolved, That the Body do now adjourn.

The Session concluded at 3.40 pm.