



**BRITISH-IRISH INTER-PARLIAMENTARY BODY**  
**COMHILACHT IDIR-PIARLAIMINTEACH NA BREATAINE**  
**AGUS NA hÉIREANN**

**29TH PLENARY SESSION**  
**RESPONSE BY IRISH GOVERNMENT**



ÓIFIG AN AIRE GNÓTHAÍ EACHTRACHA  
(OFFICE OF THE MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS)

BAILE ÁTHA CLIATH 2  
DUBLIN 2

Mr Pat Carey, T.D.  
Co-Chair  
British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body  
Leinster House  
Dublin 2

21 February 2004

Dear Co-Chair,

I am pleased to have the opportunity to respond, on behalf of the Government, to the interesting, informed and very useful debates which took place at the last plenary session of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body in Chepstow from 17-19 October last.

The debate on political developments in Northern Ireland was, as always, a valuable and stimulating discussion of the issues facing all of us in working towards the full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement. The cross-party support which the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body offers to both Governments in our efforts to secure peace and political stability in Northern Ireland is very much appreciated.

When the Body last met in Chepstow, many of us were hopeful that the outstanding issues were near to resolution and that a comprehensive agreement would be reached. However, as you know, it was not possible to reach agreement in respect of the transparency element of decommissioning nor on the clarity of commitment in respect of the ending of paramilitary activity. The subsequent Northern Bank raid and its attribution to the IRA has been a very unwelcome and disappointing setback for the peace process. The need for a complete end to all forms of paramilitary activity, including criminality, has never been clearer. In order to restore trust and confidence on all sides, these issues must be addressed definitively. The two Governments will continue to work to encourage those who have direct influence on these issues to find a way to restore the trust and confidence to get the process back on track. In the meantime, the Governments will continue to work closely together to advance all aspects of the Agreement. We are determined that current difficulties should not be allowed to jeopardise the significant progress made in recent years. The Good Friday Agreement and its full implementation remains the shared working agenda for both Governments.

The Government very much welcomes the debate on smoking in public places which took place in Chepstow and, in particular, the comments on Ireland's Smoke-Free

**Workplace Initiative** The Government notes the steps being taken in our neighbouring jurisdictions to provide for the introduction of smoke-free workplaces legislation and wishes all concerned every success with this important public health intervention.

March 2005 will see Ireland celebrating the first anniversary of the introduction of our Smoke-Free Workplace Initiative. This positive, progressive health and safety measure has bestowed immediate and long-term health benefits to workers and the general public alike. The response to date across all sectors is very positive with compliance at a very high level. The successful introduction of the new public health measure reflects the widespread public support, enthusiasm and goodwill that exists for a healthy, smoke-free environment in the workplace.

This measure is providing a health legacy, not just for current, but also for future Irish generations, who thankfully will never know what it was like to work in an enclosed smoke-filled environment.

The debate on Committee D's report on Waste Management was most timely, considering the challenges facing us in improving the manner in which we deal with waste. As a number of the speakers noted, the plastic bag tax in Ireland has proven very successful. It has resulted in a 94% decrease in litter arising from plastic bags while the monies collected from the levy, which are allotted to the Environment Fund, is helping to fund over 90 local authority recycling projects.

The Government's efforts to make consumers and business aware of the need to "Reduce, Reuse and Recycle" has been led by a successful waste awareness campaign, the "Race against Waste", which included TV, radio and press publicity. In combination with Northern Ireland's "Wake up to Waste" campaign, a cross-border campaign was undertaken in the second half of 2004.

I am pleased to note that the increased use of recycling has now resulted in the overall recycling rate increasing from 9% in 1998 to 28% in 2003, representing very significant progress towards the target of recycling 35% of all municipal waste by 2013. There has been a remarkable increase in the recycling of packaging waste with a recycling rate of 42% in 2003. Ireland is currently on track to meet the target of recycling 50% of all packaging waste by 2005. It is estimated that 500,000 of the State's households had a recycling collection service available to them in 2003. The Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government are also in the process of establishing a Market Development Programme, which will aim to develop markets for recyclable materials.

As a number of contributions to the debate noted, however, recycling is just one element of waste management strategy. There must also be an effort to reduce the amount of waste generated as part of an overall effort to lessen our dependence on landfill.

25 FEB 2005 (FBI)

I hope the [redacted] [redacted] membership. I'm pleased to note that Ireland will be hosting the next session of the Body in Bundoran in March. As a former co-chair of the Body I am delighted to take this opportunity to offer my best wishes for a successful meeting.

Yours sincerely,



Dermot Ahern T.D.  
Minister for Foreign Affairs