



BRITISH-IRISH PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY
TIONÓL PARLAIMINTEACH NA BREATAINE AGUS NA
hÉIREANN

Forty-First Plenary Conference, 21 - 23 November 2010,

Douglas, Isle of Man

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Membership of the
British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly
Steering Committee

Co-Chairmen

Mr Niall BLANEY TD

Rt Hon Lord COPE of Berkeley

Vice-Chairmen

Mrs Margaret CONLON TD

Mr Seymour CRAWFORD TD

Rt Hon Paul MURPHY MP

Mr Laurence ROBERSTON MP

Senator Alan BRECKON

Mrs Rosemary BUTLER AM

Lord DUBS

Mr Barry McELDUFF MLA

Dr Alasdair McDONNELL MLA MP

Mr Alasdair MORGAN MSP

Mr Jim O'KEEFE TD

Mr Robert WALTER MP

Members and Associate Members in Attendance

Mr Brian ADAM MSP

Mr David McCLARTY MLA

Mr Joe BENTON MP

Dr Alasdair McDONNELL MLA, MP

Lord BEW

Mr Barry McELDUFF MLA

Baroness BLOOD

Ms Esther McVEY MP

Senator Dan BOYLE

Mr Alasdair MORGAN MSP

Mr Johnny BRADY TD

Rt Hon Paul MURPHY MP

Senator Alan Breckon

Senator Francie O'BRIEN

Mr Conor BURNS MP

Mr Charlie O'CONNOR TD

Senator John CARTY

Mr Fergus O'DOWD TD

Senator Donie CASSIDY

Dr Rory O'HANLON TD

Mrs Margaret CONLON TD

Mr Jim O'KEEFFE TD

Mr Seymour CRAWFORD TD

Mr John ROBERTSON MP

Mr Jim DOBBIN MP

Mr Laurence ROBERTSON MP

Lord DUBS

Hon Steve RODAN SHK

Senator John ELLIS

Lord ROGAN

Senator Geraldine FEENEY

Mr Andrew ROSINDELL MP

Mr Paul FLYNN MP

Mr Chris RUANE MP

Lord GLENTORAN

Mr Jim SHERIDAN MP

Deputy Graham GUILLE

Mr Iain SMITH MSP

Baroness HARRIS of Richmond

Lord SMITH of Clifton

Mr Brian HAYES TD

Mr Noel TREACY TD

Mr Hugh HENRY MSP

Mr Robert WALTER MP

Mr Kris HOPKINS MP

Mrs Joyce WATSON AM

Senator Terry LEYDEN

Mr Jim WELLS MLA

Dr Dai LLOYD AM

Mr Gavin WILLIAMSON MP

Senator Diarmuid WILSON

Others Present

<p>The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Rt Hon Owen Paterson MP</p> <p>The Chief Minister of the Isle of Man, Mr J A Brown MHK</p> <p>The President of the Nordic Council, Mr Helgi Hjörvar</p>	
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Officials

Joint Clerks to the Assembly	Clerks of the Devolved Institutions
<p>Ms Alda Barry</p> <p>Mr Paul Kelly</p>	<p>Mr Steven Bell</p> <p>Mr Robert Lloyd-Williams</p> <p>Mrs Sheila McClelland</p> <p>Mr Michael De La Haye</p>

Committee Clerks to the Assembly

Committee A: Sovereign Matters Ms Sighle FitzGerald Mr Adrian Jenner	Committee B: European Affairs Mr Eliot Wilson Ms Aoife McGarry
Committee C: Economic Ms Jullee Clarke Ms Tracey Jessop	Committee D: Environmental and Social Mr Nicolas Besly Ms Jullee Clarke
Irish and British Secretariats Émer Deane, Irish Policy Adviser Ms Jullee Clarke Sir Michael Davies KCB Mrs Amanda Healy	Official Reporters Ms Ellen Callister Mr David Hampton Mr Will Humphreys-Jones Mr Lorcan Kennedy Ms Clare Maddox Mr Jonny Redpath

Monday 22 November 2010

The Assembly met at 9.40 am.

PLENARY BUSINESS

The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):

Cuirim fáilte romhaibh go hOileán Mhanainn. I welcome all Members to the Isle of Man. In particular, on behalf of the Assembly, I warmly welcome our new Co-Chairman, the Rt Hon Lord Cope of Berkeley. *[Applause.]* I look forward to working with Lord Cope on behalf of all Members to advance the aims of the Assembly. Lord Cope, you are most welcome.

The Co-Chairman (The Lord Cope):

Members, I am delighted to be the Co-Chair of this Assembly, which still has a very important role to play in the relationships between all of us in these islands. In particular, it is extremely nice to be here in the Isle of Man. I believe that it is the first time that we have met in one of the Crown dependencies, and it is extraordinarily nice that that turned out to be the Isle of Man. It is a charming island, as those of you who know it will appreciate.

There is one item of important business to remind you of before we commence, which is to turn off your pagers, beepers and other any more modern equipment that you may have so that they do not interrupt the session while you are in the room. I also remind you that that the proceedings of this body do not attract parliamentary privilege. We always give that reminder.

The United Kingdom delegation was renominated following the general election that we had

earlier this year. I will not read out the names of all the Members and various associates; they are in the relevant documentation. There have been one or two changes, but they are all there and can all be seen. There are several associates who are representing all Members who are here, but, again, I do not need to read all those out.

Before we go any further, our colleague Steve Rodan, who is the Speaker of the House of Keys here on the Isle of Man, would like to say a word.

Mr Steve Rodan SHK:

Thank you, Co-Chairman. Moghrey mie, everyone. On behalf of Tynwald, the Parliament of the Isle of Man, I extend the warmest of welcomes to you all. It is a great privilege for the Isle of Man to be the venue for this plenary conference. We are delighted to have you among us and we hope that you will see something of a beautiful island.

I take this opportunity to place on record the appreciation of the people of the Isle of Man to the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly for the actions that were taken during the last plenary conference in Cavan, when a resolution was passed unanimously that called for the restoration of the reciprocal health agreement between the Isle of Man and the United Kingdom. That unanimous decision was a key element of an announcement that was made in March announcing a suspension of the intention to end that agreement. I am very pleased to advise those who are perhaps not aware that the reciprocal health agreement was fully restored on 1 October. I pay tribute in particular to the actions that were taken by the then Co-Chair Paul Murphy, who carried forward the results of that decision to high quarters, and I thank Members of other devolved Administrations for raising the matter in their Parliaments. Thank you very much. *[Applause.]*

The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):

Thank you very much, Steve . I recall that, two years ago we were in this exact building, and we held a meeting of the Steering Committee that was also very well received. Thank you for your hospitality.

Before we move to the adoption of the proposed programme of business, the Co-Chair and I

thought that we should say something about the political context and backdrop against which the Assembly meets. Put simply, bilateral relations between Britain and Ireland have never been stronger. Last Monday marked the twenty-fifth anniversary of the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, as you are all aware. The warm relations, the level of trust, the respect and co-operation that have been built up in the period since then, including through the totality of relationships, are reflected and nurtured in the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly and have all been remarkable.

Last Monday, marking the 25 years of British-Irish partnership, Prime Minister Cameron said of those who worked for an Anglo-Irish Agreement:

“Your work has provided immeasurable benefit to our peoples over the past 25 years. By contributing to peace, reconciliation and the establishment of stable self-government in Northern Ireland. But also through the remarkable development of relations between us as a whole.”

The Taoiseach, Brian Cowen, also commented on the achievement. He said:

“We now know that what flowed from the Anglo Irish Agreement, the Downing Street Declaration and the Good Friday Agreement was more than a peace process. It is nothing short of a transformation in relations on these islands. And at its heart lies a partnership between our two Governments that is both extraordinary and unmatched anywhere else in the EU and beyond. The first ever visit to the Irish Embassy by a member of the Royal Family in recent days is a reminder of how this transformation still unfolds. It will continue to unfold. It is unstoppable.”

That is the backdrop to today’s plenary meeting. There is also another backdrop, reflected in the theme of the conference; creating space for economic development. That is the prism through which the various agenda items of the plenary meeting can be seen. The Saville report and the bill of rights for Northern Ireland are important markers in the development of a stable and reconciled Northern Ireland where economic development is possible. Economic development may be seen in more direct terms, through our discussions on tourism, its economic impact and the consideration of economic reports by the committees.

In particular, given the unprecedented economic situation, as an Assembly, we should recognise the importance of the extraordinarily close relationship between these islands and

how that relationship, which has in part been fostered by this body over the years, will stand us in good stead and help to see us through the time of economic uncertainty that currently prevails. We have come to a point where we can work together in the mutual knowledge and understanding that ultimately what is good for the UK economy is good for Ireland and vice versa.

PROGRAMME OF BUSINESS

The Co-Chairman (The Lord Cope):

The proposed programme has been set out for you. The Steering Committee recommends that we should have an additional debate and discussion on the economy and that we should insert that at the end of this morning's session.

The idea is that the general debate on the Saville report and its related matters starts in a moment or two. We have invited the Chief Minister to come at 11.00 am and we hope that the debate on the Saville report will have concluded some time about then. Then there will be a brief address by the President of the Nordic Council, and that should leave us with sufficient time before lunch to have a discussion on the economy, which the Steering Committee has invited Margaret Conlon to lead off. Otherwise the business is as set out on the piece of paper. Are there any comments on that? If not, may I have your agreement to the proposed agenda?

Members indicated assent.

The Co-Chairman (The Lord Cope):

We will move on to the first debate. Members will have noted that on the tables there are forms for Members to fill out when they want to put questions to the speakers in the various debates or to take part in them.

A Member:

There are no forms.

The Co-Chairman (The Lord Cope):

In that case, you will have to indicate by a show of hands should you wish to speak.

Mr Jim O’Keeffe TD:

I will use the old fashioned method.

The Co-Chairman (The Lord Cope):

Fine. Do you wish to speak now? OK; you are just waving. I was not sure whether you were waving or drowning.

THE SAVILLE REPORT AND RELATED MATTERS

The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):

We will now have a general debate on the Saville report — which, as you know, was published in June — and the events of Bloody Sunday. Lord Bew, one of our members, wants to open today’s discussion. As many know, Lord Bew is a professor of Irish politics at Queen’s University, Belfast, and a member of the Royal Irish Academy. He was historical adviser to the Saville Inquiry from 1998 to 2001.

The Lord Bew:

Thank you very much, Co-Chairman. As you rightly said, I was the historical adviser to the tribunal, and I want to use that as a way into a discussion of the tribunal, the way it worked and the issues that are at stake. Obviously when one takes on something like that it is because one thinks it is desirable and important to get to the truth of what actually happened. I had quite considerable doubts as to how far we would be able to go along that road, particularly because — as outlined in one of my earlier reports — I had grave doubts about how we could handle

sensitive, intelligence-related matters; in other words, issues about what sort of intelligence the army was receiving about developments in the Bogside, for example, on the eve of Bloody Sunday. I did not see how those issues could be sorted out.

There is also the famous report of the agent "Infliction", who claims to say things about Martin McGuinness's role. Again, I was very uncertain as to how that evidence can be handled. At the time of my second report I had read "Infliction's" evidence, but I made no reference to it because I did not know how to treat it. One of the achievements of Lord Saville was to deal with those intelligence matters extremely well and extremely seriously. My concern that they would present insurmountable obstacles was not in the end justified.

For the first few weeks I was working with an absence of documents, which I asked to see. It seemed to me on the basis of newspaper and public reports that there was a possible credible interpretation of Bloody Sunday, which was that the British Army basically thought that it was getting on top of the IRA. Whether that is right or wrong is another point, but if you read the interviews given by army officers to the London press you can see that they thought they were getting on top of the IRA everywhere but Derry, and that Derry was a tough nut that required to be cracked. There was a possible interpretation based purely on the public prints to the effect that you have to see Bloody Sunday in that context, which I leant towards. I think that anybody would if they just read the newspapers in the months before Bloody Sunday.

Once the documents were delivered to me, it was perfectly clear that that interpretation did not really stand up, for a number of reasons. I will explain first of all at the level of the British political system, and then say a little about the Army. I should remind you that I had in my mind what people were saying and what the charge was about Bloody Sunday. Gerry Adams, for example, gave an interview in December 1997, shortly before Tony Blair set up the inquiry. He is now the man who leads the largest nationalist party in the North. It is indicative of the level of expectation or assumption about what is at stake here, on the part of large sections of the nationalist or republican community in the North. The interview appeared in the London newspaper, 'The Independent', on 7 December 1997. He said that one question that was very much on people's minds is Bloody Sunday. This is a direct quotation.

“Everybody knows that it was a premeditated attack as part of the military-political strategy at that time. You’d think it would be relatively easy to set up an independent inquiry to sort everything out, but to do that the Prime Minister, Mr Blair, has to challenge all that stuff. That’s the test.”

Undoubtedly, while I fully accept that there was a very important Irish Government and SDLP campaign for an inquiry, it is realistic to think that at that particular moment, Mr Blair had reason to pay attention to what Mr Adams was saying as, at that moment, the British and Irish Governments had agreed heads of agreement for the Good Friday Agreement and those heads were perceived to be tilted against Sinn Féin’s interests in the talks. Therefore, there was a need for a balancing act. The inquiry was announced more or less at that time.

That was the expectation, and not just in republican Ireland.

“A premeditated attack as part of the military-political strategy”.

Those are Gerry Adams’ words. The distinguished Australian journalist on the Sunday Times Insight Team, Murray Sayle, died recently. Murray Sayle’s view was that it was not so much a premeditated political act, but a premeditated military act. His view was that Bloody Sunday should be seen like other moments in military history and that the Civil Rights march in Derry was such an important thing that the IRA had to defend it. He claimed that the British Army’s thinking was that an attack on that march would either bring out the IRA to defend it, in which case, it could be cut down, or, if the IRA did not defend the march, it would lose enormous prestige as a result.

The conspiracy theory is not confined simply to Sinn Féin. Murray Sayle was a very distinguished and successful journalist on the Sunday Times Insight Team and he was very influential in the reporting of the early days of the Troubles. That is the backdrop for anyone who starts to work on this material.

At the level of a premeditated political strategy, it becomes clear, almost immediately we go through the documents, that it just cannot be true. In a Cabinet meeting two weeks before Bloody Sunday, Edward Heath and his Cabinet discussed the situation in Northern Ireland. The Cabinet members recognised that they had a special problem, in that Derry remained

particularly difficult. However, they decided that nothing should be done of a radical, military nature until some political move won over the Catholic community. That is the clear conclusion of that Cabinet meeting. Therefore, it is inconceivable that Bloody Sunday, two weeks later, represents the will or thinking of the British Cabinet.

In the case of the Northern Irish Cabinet, it is clear that there is a certain amount of natural angst, a feeling that there is too much rioting and that someone should do something about Derry. The Northern Ireland Cabinet still existed at that time. However, it is equally clear that its influence on the senior British military was slight to say the least. Throughout this period, and in the month before Bloody Sunday, the senior British military briefed 'The Guardian' newspaper that it did not listen to what it heard from Northern Irish politicians whom it regarded as jumped-up county councillors and listened only to what it heard from London. It is inconceivable. Long before the turn of the century, the political conspiracy aspect, in which so many people in Ireland believed, was dead.

Eamon McCann, who is one of the great campaigners for the families, said that quite explicitly in a 'Sunday Tribune' article six years ago. A year ago in the 'Belfast Telegraph', he said that he had wrongly believed that there had been a high-level plan for a lethal assault.

I have to say again that if one is talking about the implications of Bloody Sunday and how things are worked out, we owe a great deal to the generosity of people like Eamon McCann and those in the Sinn Féin leadership who, after finding a conclusion from Lord Saville that did not support their conspiracy theories, still responded warmly to the Prime Minister's speech on the day of the report's publication. It is quite clear that what Lord Saville came up with on the political and military conspiracy was not had been expected to a considerable degree. Despite a lot of comment on David Cameron's important and brilliant speech, the reaction from the Bogside in particular has been insufficiently remarked upon.

The truth about the Saville report is that it is a remarkable piece of work. I will address the issues of cost and how much of it was inevitable. An awful lot of the cost was inevitable, but there are lessons to be learned. The inquiry cannot an infinitely repeatable experiment, and I do

not just say that because we now live in financially chastened times.

Now that I have mentioned the issue of cost, people will immediately ask what happened over the past 10 years to wrap up so many millions of pounds of public expenditure when, on the basis of the release of documents, an important and large chunk of Lord Saville's final conclusions was available at before the turn of the century. That is a question that has to be asked, and it is not an unreasonable one.

Lord Saville gave an excellent defence to the House of Commons Select Committee on why the expenditure rose. One thing that he said was tremendously important; he had a duty of care to all those who gave evidence, which involved considerable expense. He also had to follow up lines of inquiry. Where there were issues around documents in General Sir Mike Jackson's name and General Ford's name, nationalist Ireland was justifiably interested and potentially critical and disturbed about what those might mean. Therefore, Lord Saville had to follow all of those issues up in a major way.

I have already indicated that the sorting of intelligence information also required major investigation and discussion. For example, considerable time and money were spent on establishing the credibility of the evidence from David Shayler, who was an intelligence officer. David Shayler made comment about the credibility of infliction.

Again, some of those costs were unavoidable. However, the eight days that the former Prime Minister Edward Heath spent in the witness box were largely expensive public theatre. I understand from the former Prime Minister's friends that he enjoyed the whole thing and that it extended his life by some time. Having said that, those were eight very expensive days that added absolutely nothing to what we already knew after the release of the public documents. We already knew that he had not ordered Bloody Sunday or anything like it and that, although he had had a mind about the situation in Derry, it was entirely different to what had transpired on Bloody Sunday. Nothing that was said in those eight days in the court room with the expensive barristers changed any of that.

An awful lot of what Lord Saville did was unavoidable. For example there was an awful lot of

expense incurred from finding soldiers whose whereabouts the army did not know. One has to reasonably accept that cost.

Let us remind ourselves the conclusion of Lord Widgery's inquiry, so often seen as a whitewash. The words "Widgery" and "whitewash" are intimately connected in the minds of everybody; I was going to say everybody on the island of Ireland but it probably applies to people on both islands.

This what Lord Widgery concluded:

"At one end of the scale some soldiers showed a high degree of responsibility; at the other ... firing bordered on the reckless."

He goes on to say:

"None of the dead and wounded is proved to have been shot whilst handling a firearm or bomb."

Lord Saville's conclusion about what happened was that there was a loss of fire discipline in support company C.

How radically different are those two conclusions, if there is no wider conspiracy? That is not to say that the Widgery report is satisfactory; it clearly is not. It does not face up to the suffering caused in Derry by those events. The forensics that it was based on were, to say the least, inadequate. I think that people lied to Widgery, and got away with it. That is not to say that the Widgery report is satisfactory; it is to say that the gap between it and Lord Saville's report is not as large as is conventionally said.

That is not meant to be a comforting point for the British Army, because Lord Widgery clearly criticises reckless firing. One of the first things I saw when the documents were released was that the Army very quickly believed after the Widgery Report that something badly wrong happened in Derry on that day. It is perfectly clear that a common sense quickly forms in the

British Army that that, in a bad way, was a triumph of the canteen culture of the Paras. It is perfectly clear that there was a very quick assumption.

They did not read Widgery as saying: "That's fine, chaps. Everything was all right on the day." They saw the reference that nobody who was killed was proved to be guilty of anything. Do not forget that John Major was able to say that everybody who died on the day should be regarded as innocent. They saw that, and thought: "This is not good, not good at all." Indeed, I think that it had important implications for a more professional attitude by the British Army over the rest of the Troubles.

However, there is an issue there: if Lord Widgery criticised the actions of certain soldiers, was any disciplinary action taken? So, it is not a completely comfortable matter to say, as I do, that Widgery is not as much of a whitewash as it is considered to be. Objectively, it is closer than is usually admitted to Saville's eventual conclusion, because there is a fundamental issue that seems to have slipped the attention of many, which is that if Widgery criticised the behaviour of soldiers on the day, which he certainly did, then what was the follow up? The answer to that is an interesting question.

Mr Adams refers to a political/military conspiracy, and most of my remarks dealt with the fact that there was no political conspiracy, which was Lord Saville's conclusion. Indeed, that is a total misreading of British Government strategy at the time, which was to win over the Catholic community in the North if it possibly could, and to look for ways to mollify it, rather than to aggravate it. That was the whole tone of the Cabinet discussion on the eve of Bloody Sunday.

Mr Adams also talks about the implications of a high-level military strategy. That, it seemed to me, was some time after the clear demonstration. I would say that there was no high-level political strategy by 1999. As a possibility, a number of documents attached to the names of senior officers are questionable in their wisdom in and around Bloody Sunday. I will put it no higher than that. Lord Saville's conclusion happens to be the same that I have made based on my analysis of the documents. It is that the reading that some have given to the documents that were written by General Ford is not correct. He stops, as it were, the line of serious criticism of Colonel Wilford, and it does not go higher than that. It so happens that I read those documents

in the same way.

However, this is a difficult matter of interpretation, and it is possible, in good faith, to disagree seriously with what I have written about the subject and what Lord Saville has written about the subject. Some of you may have noticed that, after the immediate euphoria, that issue was returned to in the Irish newspapers. As I said earlier, Eamonn McCann has made it clear that he no longer believes in any political conspiracy, but he still thinks that there are issues of senior military officers that have not been dealt with properly in the report. I think that Saville is right, but I can see why Eamonn McCann and Dr Niall O'Doherty have a problem with it. There is genuine room for argument here, and I wanted to conclude by acknowledging that.

That also demonstrates the point that Saville could not definitively resolve everything. We have to accept that when we think of future inquiries. I regard Saville as enormously professional. It sorted out a number of issues that I did not think could be sorted out, particularly that of the quality of the intelligence that the Army received on the Bogside on the eve of Bloody Sunday. That was such a mess in the first place, and he sorted out it and a number of other issues with admirable clarity and professionalism. It is still entirely possible that, over time, and as more documents come out, certain parts of it will have to be revised, even at its price of just under £200 million.

That leads me to my conclusion that, although it is one thing to say that the report is a professional job, it is already moving out of public consciousness. The fact that the Prime Minister who called the inquiry into being, Tony Blair, says in his memoirs that Bloody Sunday happened in Belfast tells you something about that. Apart from David Cameron's speech, the public discussion has been rather jaded in some ways. Given the length of time, that is perhaps inevitable, although that is very unfortunate for the families, who, in some ways, were entitled to a more vigorous public discussion than that which has ensued since the Saville report was published.

I am simply making the point that it is not a repeatable experiment. The subsequent example of the Billy Wright inquiry demonstrates that point. That came in at £42 million, and it satisfied no one. It has not even been able to answer the fundamental question of how the

arms that killed Billy Wright got into the prison. We are in a space where those things are explained partly by bad luck. Oddly enough, more of the senior actors that were involved in Bloody Sunday were still alive 30-odd years later. Ten years on from Billy Wright's death, many of the key players are dead, oddly enough. More relevant documents have survived from Bloody Sunday than from Billy Wright's death. That is not a comment on the inquiry, but it tells you about the inherent limitations of inquiries.

Miraculously, the Saville report is complete because, amazingly enough, so many people lived on who were relevant to the inquiry and so many documents survived. Even then, it is open to understandable challenge on certain points. I have mentioned the arguments of Eamonn McCann and Niall O'Doherty on how the report deals with how far up the military chain of command justified criticism should go. As the Secretary of State has been indicating in the past few days, most recently in the Lord Steinburg memorial speech last week, it is not surprising that the consequences are that those issues have to be faced up to. However, this expensive, heavily legalistic model is in some cases required by the fact that there are likely to be prosecutions. In Northern Ireland, as Tony Blair said, we have turned our criminal justice system inside out. In the normal sense of the matter, the normal context, that was not known when the Saville inquiry was set up. Once we introduced the programme of early releases and so on, we entered a different terrain. I do not know how or why, and I do not wish to prejudge it, but we know the way a criminal justice system reacts after something like that has happened with respect to any subsequent accusations or proof of guilt against individuals in whatever type of event is investigated.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):

I must ask you to conclude, please.

The Lord Bew:

Lord Saville's report was a remarkable achievement. It is not infinitely repeatable.

Dr Rory O'Hanlon TD:

I thank Lord Bew for his very important contribution. I take on board everything he says.

The Saville report is to be welcomed very much. I do not see the cost as a factor. If we look at the effect that the report has had, we find that it has been very beneficial to people in the North. It was very much welcomed by the families, the communities and the Government in the South. In Dáil Éireann, we passed a resolution commending the report. We recognise the contribution of Prime Minister Cameron in the House of Commons, in which he referred to what happened as “unjustified and unjustifiable” and he apologised to the relatives and the people of Derry. That was all very important in respect of reconciliation.

Another significant feature is that, the day after the report was published, the Protestant bishops and leaders of the Protestant Churches in Derry met the families. They were led by Ken Good, who said that a cloud had been lifted from over Derry and that is how we all feel about it.

It is a valuable report and it is important that it was written. I accept the points that Lord Bew made that Lord Widgery’s report aggravated the situation because the perception of the Widgery report, to use the terminology current at the time, is that it was a whitewash and that it did not go in detail into what happened. Professor Dermot Walsh referred to it as:

“a defeat for true justice and the rule of law”.

Professor Walsh also drew attention to the fact that military witnesses gave conflicting evidence, one version to the military authorities on the days immediately following Bloody Sunday and another to the solicitors for the Treasury. Therefore, I understand why the Widgery report was unacceptable and why people at the time thought it a whitewash. The Saville report is clear and explicit, and it is important for everyone to remember that, of the people who were killed — and we must always remember that there were 14 of them — none posed a threat or was causing death or serious injury. Therefore, I very much welcomed the Saville report.

However, I feel that we should be looking for lessons to be learned from what happened on Bloody Sunday. I hope that we will never again have that sort of trouble on the island, North or South, or anywhere else. Unfortunately, however, we have it in other parts of the world. It is important that we learn lessons. I did not read every one of the 5,000 pages, but I read a number of sections. Something that struck me very forcibly was the fact that local senior

security officers in the RUC at the time were ignored and that the military made a decision over the heads of the people who had local knowledge. Had that local knowledge have been listened to, I have no doubt that we would not be here discussing what happened on Bloody Sunday.

The other issue is the impact that such incidents have on people who want to engage themselves in violence of a paramilitary nature. Bloody Sunday was one of those incidents, of which there were three or four, including internment and the hunger strikes, that became a recruitment drive for the IRA. As a result of the report, we should look at how we move forward. We have moved forward very well in respect of reconciliation and, above all, putting at ease the concerns of the families, friends and relatives of the people who were killed and injured on Bloody Sunday and exonerating and restoring their good names. However, we could learn lessons. Perhaps somebody, not necessarily this body, should look closer at what happened in Derry and see how that can be avoided elsewhere in the world and what contribution can be made.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):

We now have Paul Murphy. I am delighted that you, a former Co-Chairman, are here.

Mr Paul Murphy MP:

Thank you very much, Co-Chairman. I enjoyed and appreciated Paul Bew's introduction to this short debate. It was, as always, masterly. When the inquiry was set up, I was the Minister of State. During the talks, Mo Mowlam was the Secretary of State and Tony Blair was the Prime Minister. I have no regrets at all; it was absolutely the right thing to do, then and now. I am delighted for two reasons. First, to get justice for the families and provide the truth. Secondly, it was very much a part of ensuring that the peace process started. In both respects, Lord Saville, after so many years, got the right answer.

I was troubled about the cost of the inquiry as time went on. When I was the Secretary of State, it was my job to ensure that there were proper public services in Northern Ireland. I could have done with £200 million to use elsewhere. However, had that inquiry not happened and had the result not been as it was — David Cameron made a brilliant speech in the House of Commons on the day on which the report was published — I am sure that we would not have

had the peace process as it has been and I am sure that there would not have been satisfaction for the families concerned in finding out the truth.

The problem, of course, and I agree with Rory, is about where we go from now. Judge Cory, who was the Canadian judge who was asked to look at four other cases, including those of Finucane and Nelson, came to the conclusion that we should have more public inquiries, and another three were set up. The Finucane one, of course, was not agreed. We have had the Billy Wright one. Paul was right to say that they cost an awful lot of money. There comes a stage at which big legal inquiries, such as the one that we are discussing, have to come to an end. However, that does not mean that the process of reconciliation and dealing with the past has to come to an end. A few years ago, this Assembly discussed the report of the Eames/Bradley group. It is a pity that only one of that report's recommendations was in the public eye because there were lots of others that the Government in Northern Ireland now must have a look at to ensure that we continue down the path of reconciliation and deal with the past.

Mr Seymour Crawford TD:

I want to pay tribute to the British Prime Minister, Mr Cameron, and Secretary of State Owen Paterson, who were absolutely brilliant in the way that they handled the situation. That certainly led to a lot of satisfaction for the families concerned, and for those with an interest in the matter.

Bloody Sunday is remembered by all of us for all the wrong reasons. It was clearly not premeditated, as was suggested at the time, but was part of our protest. The Saville report makes it clear that none of the 14 people who died was carrying arms or bombs on the day in question.

As a direct result of that action, many more died, and many more young people got involved in organisations, which led to a lot more trouble. So, it is extremely important to do whatever we can to ensure that something such as that never happens again, no matter what the cost.

However, the cost cannot be ignored. When I and my party leader and colleagues met the Sinn Féin party in Stormont, Mr Gerry Adams was adamant that we need inquiries into a lot of

other issues. I said to him: “Without a doubt, if we go down that road, a lot of other people will want inquiries as well.” Although the Saville report was tremendous and brilliant in clarifying the whole situation, we must have a new look at what Paul Murphy spoke of, namely, the Eames-Bradley report.

We discussed the Eames-Bradley report on a number of occasions. Unfortunately, only one negative section of it was ever given publicity. Clearly, those two men, and a much larger committee, did a tremendous job to try to look into the whole past situation and how it could be dealt with. We must try to learn from that report how issues such as Bloody Sunday can be dealt with in a more progressive way, rather than dealing with it through the sort of inquiry that Saville was. We have had so many inquiries in Dublin into different issues, and their cost is horrendous. As politicians, we must be able to find a better way.

David Cameron’s apology was extremely important. As Dr O’Hanlon said, the visit by the leaders of the Protestant Churches the following day was equally an act of reconciliation. We can go down that way. As one who has been involved with the Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation, meeting all sorts of groups, one eye opener was meeting people who were led into the IRA by Bloody Sunday, and who admitted to having been involved in bombings and shootings. We must, if possible, ensure that nothing such as that happens again. As Dr O’Hanlon said, it is important in even a worldwide structure that the report is used maybe to avoid other situations.

The inquiry was handled in an extremely beneficial way for all concerned at every level. As Dr O’Hanlon said, we had an all-party motion in the Dáil. It was a very long motion, but it is worth putting one portion of it on the record. It recalls that many families suffered as a result of acts of violence from all sides, and acknowledges the ongoing pain and suffering of all those bereaved and injured as a result of the conflict. We must move on. This Assembly has certainly played a role in a better understanding among our peoples. We can still play that role, and help to mend bridges that need to be mended still.

The Lord Dubs:

I pay tribute to Lord Bew for the clear way in which he summarised the results of the Saville

inquiry and to David Cameron for the way in which he handled it. It has been widely acknowledged that he handled it well. If he had not, the consequences would have been most unfortunate.

One other set of issues comes out of this. I have had two meetings with the Ballymurphy families. I know that there is a view that, if we do not draw a line and if we go on having inquiries, the thing will never stop. That was my instinct when I saw the results of the Saville inquiry. The incidents at Ballymurphy took place before Bloody Sunday. Having met the Ballymurphy families, I would find it hard to tell the families that we are not going to do anything about their incident and that we have drawn a line under the events in Derry. I have talked to quite a number of people, as well as the families. The events in Ballymurphy were, in some ways, even worse than what happened in Derry. It is not important to discuss that bit, but it seems to me that 11 people were murdered over three days. From detailed discussions with the families and having looked at this, it is difficult to believe that the majority were not entirely innocent, but that is something for an inquiry.

The people are asking for an inquiry. It is very hard to tell them that they cannot have one, much as it would be neater not to have any more. I told them that if there is going to be any acceptance of further inquiries, such as an inquiry about Ballymurphy, it has got to be accepted that they will not be like Saville. They will be short and quick; there will be a limit to the number of witnesses; and they will have to be handled at less cost. Otherwise, nobody would go along with it. Although the people whom I spoke to were not necessarily representative of all of the Ballymurphy family victims, the fact is that they said yes.

I feel that we cannot say that we will not have an inquiry. I told them that there were others and asked what we should do about those. They said that that was not their problem and that it was their feeling that they had to do something about their families and loved ones. If I tell you that some of those who were murdered had been in the British Army or had a relative in the British Army, you will agree that it is difficult to believe that they were the sort of people who were involved in terrorism or that they were carrying weapons. However, they said that they could not answer for other inquiries and that they simply wanted something done about their people. They said that they want an exoneration of the loved ones in their families who were

shot because they were, allegedly, carrying weapons.

I know that the Secretary of State is not keen on an inquiry. I had a brief chat with him, and he is not keen. He said that the Historical Enquiries Team (HET) would do it, but I do not think that the HET is geared to do it or would be the appropriate body to do it. I think that we have got to tackle this in some way or another, because we cannot leave it like this. It is not fair to the families, and I do not think that it will deal with the sort of closure that the families want.

Mr Jim O’Keefe TD:

This is a day when we in Ireland have reason to be thankful to the British Government for the lead that they took in the process and openly supporting us in our economic problems. Today, we have also had expressions of congratulations to the Prime Minister, David Cameron, for the way in which he dealt with the Saville report in the House of Commons. I endorse those comments. It is against that background that I have some hesitation in taking a gentle issue on some of the perspectives in relation to the Saville report, as highlighted very learnedly by Lord Bew. I come from the deep South, and I have a somewhat different perspective on Bloody Sunday and the Saville report. As somebody who was utterly opposed to the IRA and to the violence of the Troubles in Ireland, I am not sure whether there was an understanding of the enormous sense of shock and revulsion felt right throughout the island of Ireland about Bloody Sunday. Unfortunately, that sense of shock and revulsion was compounded even more as a result of Widgery.

However, this is where I take some issue with Lord Bew. What was seen to be happening — I do not want to use words such as “conspiracies”, “whitewashes” and “cover-ups” — was that an injustice that had been perpetrated was being compounded by an official report. There is a huge distinction between Widgery and Saville. Widgery sat alone for 11 weeks and heard from no civilian witnesses. How, then, was he going to get a fair picture of what happened? He did not talk to any of the victims, and yet he was able to come up with a definitive conclusion about what happened on Bloody Sunday.

As mentioned by Lord Bew, Widgery said:

“None of the deceased or wounded is proved to have been shot whilst handling a firearm or a bomb.”

He left it at that: it had not been “proved”. Mind you, he compounded that by saying:

“There is no reason to suppose that the soldiers would have opened fire if they had not been fired upon first.”

He also said:

“there is a strong suspicion that some of the victims had been firing weapons”.

That was Widgery, on the one hand. On the other hand, we had Saville, accompanied by two fine judges from Australia and Canada, who was absolutely clear and unequivocal in saying:

“None of the casualties shot by soldiers of Support Company was armed with a firearm”.

He also said:

“In no case was any warning given before soldiers opened fire.”

The contrast between the two is absolutely clear to me, and there should not be any effort made to suggest otherwise.

As far as we in Ireland are concerned, Saville lanced a deep-seated boil. For people such as me, who have no time for violence of any kind, we saw what happened on Bloody Sunday and the subsequent Widgery report as a boil that had to be lanced. That was our general view. However, we also felt for the families who had been affected and bereaved, and for those who had been shot and wounded.

We have a huge sense of pride in the way that the current Prime Minister and the

Government handled the issue and in the families' attitude. Those families really showed themselves to be true heroes for way in which they dealt with the report. When they stood outside the Guild Hall and called for a minute's silence for not just for their loved ones, but all those who had died in the Troubles, they covered themselves with glory from thereon.

When we talk about costings, it would not have cost so much if there had not been Widgery. Part of the job that had to be done was to expiate the damage created by Widgery. One way or the other, however, it was a necessary job that had to be done, had to be completed, and we are delighted. I think that I speak for a lot of people in Ireland when I say that Saville did such a wonderful job. His report was dealt with in such a fashion by the present British Government, and, most importantly, by the families of the victims.

Mr Barry McElduff MLA:

Go raibh maith agaibh, a Chomh-Chathaoirligh. The Sinn Féin general position is one of support for the families in their campaign for truth. The facts are well-established, that 14 civilians were murdered. Those people were unarmed, posed no threat, and completely innocent. So, I very much welcome the Saville report.

What contributed significantly to the cost were the tactics of the British Ministry of Defence, which tried to frustrate the inquiry at many stages. I welcome the fact that Alf Dubs introduced the experience of the people of Ballymurphy, where, again, 11 people were murdered, possibly by the same British soldiers using the same weapons that were used in Derry on Bloody Sunday. That happened several months earlier.

I call for an independent international truth commission. We need an effective truth recovery process, which would have the co-operation of all relevant parties to the conflict in Ireland. It would want to be independent of the British Government, because they have not been a referee in the conflict in Ireland; they have been big players, protagonists, not facilitators or referees.

We should ask the United Nations to devise and implement all measures and processes necessary to achieve the independence of a truth recovery process. It does not have to be

highly legalistic, or involve high cost. Everybody should enter into the spirit of that, and it will have a very helpful effect.

Mr Noel Treacy TD:

I warmly welcome the conclusions of the Saville report. I agree with my colleague Deputy O’Keeffe that we would have seen Widgery as somewhat of a whitewash.

I pay tribute to Lord Bew for his fair and outstandingly professional narration of the events of four decades, because January 30 four decades ago was one of the darkest days on these islands. We pay tribute to all the people involved. I pay a special tribute to Paul Murphy. I was part of the Government team on the strand 2 negotiations during Paul Murphy’s time in Northern Ireland. His consistent political management of a serious situation, particularly the Bloody Sunday situation, was very positive at all times. We thank him today for his work, along with all his colleagues.

We also thank our own former Taoisigh, Reynolds, Bruton, Ahern and the current Taoiseach Brian Cowen for their consistent work. In particular, we pay tribute to Prime Minister Tony Blair, who, on 29 January 1998, announced the Saville inquiry. We also pay tribute to Lord Mark Saville, along with his colleagues: the Honourable John Toohey, Sir Edward Somers, and Judge William Hoyt. All those outstanding people did an outstanding job.

I chair the Good Friday Agreement Committee of our Parliament. We met the Bloody Sunday families. They carried that trauma with outstanding humanity, dignity and resilience over four decades. The announcement was made in June last by Prime Minister David Cameron. On behalf of all our colleagues, we sincerely congratulate the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Mr Cameron, for the statesmanlike, decent, dignified, humane and honest way that he dealt with a very serious situation. The way that he handled it brought a lot of comfort and solace to many wounded and traumatised people in Northern Ireland.

I agree with my colleagues Dr O’Hanlon and deputy Crawford. It is important that we learn from the situation. Despite the Saville inquiry’s very high cost, it is a tool that we can use, although not as a replica, for how to resolve many other issues. As Lord Dubs said, the

Ballymurphy issue has to be dealt with. It is a very sad and serious situation, and those families are entitled to treatment equal to that of the Bloody Sunday families. The Saville Inquiry can be used as a tool by which we can create a system and a structure that will bring about transparency, conclusion and, ultimately, justice for the people who are victims of the traumatic period that has bedevilled our island and, indeed, all of these islands over the past four decades. Hopefully, Saville will be the chapter that changes history forever.

The Lord Glentoran:

Good morning, everyone. I thought that Paul Bew's résumé of the report was brilliant. I have not read it all, but I have read some of it, and I have spoken in the House of Parliament on it. I also found it interesting to listen to the comments and questions from the Irish representatives and to hear what they think. I am sure that those contributions will be very valuable.

I shall put the day of Bloody Sunday into a bit of context. It is worthwhile to cast your mind back that it took place at the beginning, the first two years, of the Troubles. Soldiers were sent into Derry, and they were ill-briefed. Neither the military nor anyone else knew what the form was or what to expect. They did not know whether in the crowd there would be an armed gang of the IRA that would start shooting, and they did not know about anything. Those soldiers, pretty well all privates and young soldiers, went into the streets of Derry, which are small, contain many areas and are difficult. They did not know where they were. Paras or not, and I was not a para, they were frightened. There is no doubt that, as comes out in Saville, that discipline was lost, and it should not have been in such a regiment.

It is worth casting your mind back to the reasons why it happened. I do not believe that anything like that would ever happen again. The British Army has moved so far with all of the other campaigns that it has fought around the world in peacekeeping and other missions. Bloody Sunday was a terrible happening. The Prime Minister's timing was brilliant, and it might have been even better if it had come earlier under a previous Prime Minister, but it did not.

Looking to the future, I agree with most of what Lord Dubs and others have said. The most important people, from my point of view and from our point of view, are the families of the victims and the people who were wounded and left. We cannot go on having major inquiries on

the scale of Saville because, in this day and age, it is not real, but not only for that reason. When you get into the depths of the detail of the people who have been involved in the Bloody Sunday inquiry and others, you find that it does not make a large percentage of them feel any better.

Before speaking to the Saville debate in Parliament, I had a private meeting with Martin McGuinness. I asked Martin what the situation was, and the first thing that he said was that the Prime Minister was brilliant and that his speech went down extremely well. I asked him how the families were, and he said that around 50:50 or 60:40 of them were reasonably content and felt somewhat better but that an awful lot of them did not. Owen Paterson, my colleague and the Secretary of the State, has spoken to Billy Wright's family, and they do not feel any better or any differently and, I suppose, are as bitter as they were before the inquiries. A lot more thought needs to go into how future inquiries take place, if there are any, and what the effects on the families will be and how that family's grief and hurt can be helped and assisted.

The Eames report did not go down very well. Such issues as the recommendation to offer money were not very satisfactory. I hope that the Secretary of State and others in his team will be able to think a way through. I know that there is some thinking going through, because I am a member of that team. We are thinking and working towards finding a better way of looking after and helping the families, especially when there is a British Army "cock—up" or if there is another one, but I would say that there will never be another one.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):

In the interests of time, I suggest that we conclude after Ms Feeney and Dr McDonnell have spoken.

Senator Geraldine Feeney:

I will be brief; I realise that time has moved on. It is fitting that we are discussing the Saville report this morning. As members were contributing, I thought that there was a solemn air that was fitting to the report. As other members have said, it is all about the families and the devastation that was bestowed on those families four decades ago.

I listened carefully to our colleague Barry McElduff. He made the point well that, perhaps,

Saville should have been out a long time ago, but it was interrupted and delayed for obvious reasons. We have it now, and we are delighted that it is there. Last June, I arrived in late one evening, and I had about 10 missed calls from my daughter. I thought that something terrible was wrong, but when I got talking to her, she said, "Isn't it wonderful news?" I did not know what she meant, and she told me that Prime Minister Cameron had apologised. I did not know that the report had been launched, so I asked her what he had apologised for. She told me that he had apologised for Bloody Sunday. That was the biggest thing of all for me. She would not have heard about Bloody Sunday, but it was embedded in her mind from stories that she would have heard. It was hugely important to that age group in Ireland that a British Prime Minister was big enough to come out and apologise. I thank him for that.

As other people have said, all parties and leaders should take a bow. This morning, we remember Tony Blair, who worked long and hard to bring it about. People sitting around this forum this morning were intimately involved. The people who have to be commended most, as Deputy Jim O'Keefe said, are the families who had the strength and courage to stay with this and to know that a huge injustice had been done to their families and their loved ones. They were not going to be taken off this road until they got justice for their deceased and their injured.

I concur with my two colleagues Deputy Noel Treacy and Deputy Rory O'Hanlon that lessons have to be learned. We have to ensure that the like of this will never happen anywhere in the world; innocent people must never again be gunned down in a peaceful protest. Go raibh maith agat.

Dr Alasdair McDonnell MLA MP:

I want to commend and thank Lord Saville for the superb job he did in delivering a very good report in difficult circumstances. His conclusions are unambiguous and distinct. In thanking Lord Saville for that report, we need to learn from it, and we have all done so. We learned of the mistakes made. Not just is Lord Saville to be commended, but a very close second is the Prime Minister who is to be thanked for his generous and courageous remarks.

The Bloody Sunday families fought a long and enduring campaign. It is only right to say,

clearly and unequivocally, that their hurt was partly the loss of their loved ones but a much larger part of it was the Widgery report and what they perceived as the lies and dishonesty around it.

We do not want to dwell too much on the past. However, I remember as a young man, that, whatever “cock up” — as it was referred to earlier — was made by the Army, and whatever fears and misunderstandings led to this, the majority of people across the island of Ireland perceived the events of Bloody Sunday almost as a declaration of war on Ireland. It is in that context that today’s events are so important. We have put that fear and apprehension behind us.

The families have been honourable and honest in their campaign and they are extremely grateful. The generosity shown the Prime Minister’s comments in Guildhall Square in Derry was something that many of us thought we might never see. The public response showed a sense of moving on, forgiveness and common purpose. A lot of honesty came out of the Saville report and we require truth, honesty and clarity in all our relationships. The people of these islands — Britain, Ireland, and the various other parts, Scotland and Wales — need clarity, honesty and trust in relationships. In my estimation, that is what this body is about. Those values are more necessary than ever in a very difficult world. To a large extent, we need to break with the past in our relationships and set new ones for the future. The Saville report is the foundation for that.

I could say many things. I pick up on a couple of points. First, the comments of Jim O’Keefe, that the Widgery report was more propaganda than truth. We have to get back to the truth, and be honest with each other. If we use honesty as a foundation, we can build success and relationships far beyond our dreams.

I also pick up briefly on Lord Dubs’s remarks. Of the people in Ballymurphy who were killed, some were going to work, some coming from it and one was a mother out gathering up her children on a summer evening, and trying to provide breakfast for them the next day. Some answers are needed there. We must find a mechanism for getting honest answers without going to the length of time that the Saville inquiry took and the difficulties it encountered.

Ordinary people, who are innocent victims of conflict, deserve honest answers. Many victims in Northern Ireland are frozen in their grieving process. I meet that on a regular basis. People may have bottled up their grief for 30 years. Recently, I met an RUC man's widow, who had not been able to speak about his murder for some 30 years. All of that is bottled up, so we need to find a functional way of dealing with the past that meets the needs of individuals.

Nonetheless, I believe that we have learned a lot from Lord Saville. Despite all the difficulties that he faced, his honesty and integrity has set a new direction for our relationships and created space for us all to move forward, ensuring that such circumstances never arise again. Thank you.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):

I thank colleagues for a very positive and constructive debate. I suggest that we adjourn for a minute or so to allow me and my colleague Lord Cope to greet and meet Minister Brown. We will be back in public session soon.

The sitting was suspended at 11.00 am.

The sitting was resumed at 11.04 am.

ADDRESS BY THE CHIEF MINISTER OF THE ISLE OF MAN

The Co-Chairman (The Lord Cope):

Colleagues, it is, as we said earlier on in opening the session this morning, a huge pleasure to be here in *Ellan Vannin*, the Isle of Man, for all of us to come here. They have, of course, the oldest continuous parliament in the world, not only older than all our parliaments that we represent, but older than all the other parliaments as well. The longest serving Member of the House of Keys is, indeed, now the Chief Minister, Tony Brown, who is about to address us. He has represented the town of Castletown since 1981 and has been minister in a number of different government departments, and then he became the Speaker of the House of Keys and a member of this Assembly at that time. The two jobs tend to go together, apparently. It is not a rule but

the two jobs do tend to go together, but when of course he became the Chief Minister, he left the Assembly, and began to run the whole show.

It is a great pleasure, sir, to have you with us, and may I invite you to address the Assembly.

[Applause.]

The Chief Minister of the Isle of Man (Mr J A Brown MHK):

Thank you, Lord Cope, for that introduction. Can I just make it absolutely clear, so there is no misunderstanding: whilst I may be the longest serving Member of the House of Keys, I am not the oldest!

Moghrey mie, good morning to everybody. On behalf of the Government and people of the Isle of Man, it gives me great pleasure to welcome the British Irish Parliamentary Assembly to the Isle of Man for its 41st Plenary. You are most welcome and I hope that you enjoy your time here.

The good news is that I have been asked to reduce my speech, so the first 50 minutes I have thrown away, and I am now down to about 10 minutes, so hopefully it will not be too bad for you all!

This is the first time that your Plenary has been here to the Island and if I may say so, the Isle of Man is a particularly appropriate venue for such a gathering, as mentioned by your Co-Chairman, as the Isle of Man is home of the world's oldest continuous parliament in the world and that is, of course, Tynwald or *Tinvaal*, as it would be. It was established by the Norse Viking settlers, more than 1,000 years ago. I should explain in the description, the “oldest continuous parliament” refers to the unbroken existence of the institution; it does not mean that our sittings go on for ever.

Geographically, the Isle of Man sits between Britain and Ireland, and so is the perfect place for the British–Irish partnerships to meet. From the top of our highest mountain, Snaefell, we can see England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales on a particularly clear day, so watch out.

Unfortunately, we cannot see our friends in the Channel Islands, even though sometimes we like to keep an eye on what they are up to.

Like Jersey and Guernsey, the Isle of Man is a British Crown dependency and the Queen is our head of state. We are not part of the United Kingdom, and we have our own parliament, government, laws and judiciary.

An interesting range of constitutional arrangements is represented here today: very diverse, very different, but all with a common sort of interest. One thing that we have in common is that, presently, we all face unprecedented fiscal and economic challenges. We are dealing with, one way or another, the repercussions of the financial upheaval that has shaken the world in recent years.

The financial difficulties facing us all are, of course, more severe to some than to others, but often the scale of the problem is relative to each country. It is, without doubt, a most difficult time for us all, and of course for our citizens, those we represent.

Here in the Isle of Man, whilst we have our own difficulties, one of our main challenges is adjusting to the unexpected revision by the United Kingdom government of our VAT revenue-sharing arrangements with the United Kingdom. The revision was suddenly announced last year, and in addition to the general effect of the world economy which we are all experiencing, it has presented us with the unwelcome prospect of an annual shortfall in our income, rising to a reduction figure of at least £100 million or more than 20% of our net revenue budget.

This unprecedented development compelled the Manx government to urgently re-examine its activities and spending. Whilst reductions and changes have been made to budgets this year, the re-examination continues and further changes will have to be made in the coming years.

The centrepiece of our response is a five-year strategy to rebalance our government finances. This year's budget, which was in February, was the first instalment of our readjustment programme.

There are many things that we are doing, like all other countries, to endeavour to rebalance our budget, but some of our initiatives to create savings include: progressing towards a 10% reduction in overall staffing costs, and if achieved, this would save us in the region of £30 million a year; reducing staff numbers through natural wastage; a wage freeze for civil servants and public sector workers; a move to improve efficiency through the creation of shared service centres for some of the back-office support functions; and importantly, better and more extensive use of technology.

Throughout this readjustment programme, we aim to remain faithful to two overriding priorities: first, to safeguard support for the vulnerable and those most in need within our community; second, to further economic development, in order to fund needed support and sustain jobs. The first of these two priorities, support for those in need, cannot be achieved without the second, economic development to generate income and employment. Economic growth is therefore an overriding imperative for us.

Economic development has always been a priority in the Isle of Man, which was traditionally a fairly poor country, and that is up until recent times, with a history of emigration and seasonal employment. As an island with few natural resources, we have always had to look outwards to make a living, drawing upon our resilience and resourcefulness and a spirit of enterprise and innovation that are so often found amongst maritime people. Over the past 25 years, we have made considerable progress in bringing our economy and standard of living up to the level of our neighbours – yourselves.

For our small Island, space for economic development is not really a question of physical room; it is more about having a political and social culture that understands and encourages enterprise and innovation, recognising that business growth will ultimately benefit the whole community. This approach is summed up in our phrase, 'Freedom to flourish', the modern ethos of the Isle of Man, and a concept that runs through all aspects of Island life. It reflects our desire to be an island of opportunity, where people and business will find the right environment to reach their full potential.

Only last week, I attended an annual ceremony for the Awards of Excellence, which was held in the Royal Hall, here at the Villa Marina, which is an event where we celebrate local achievement in the private, public and voluntary sectors. Despite the black-tie dress code, this was not a gathering of fat cats – far from it – but a recognition of ordinary people working hard and working together for a community they love. We are very proud nation.

This community spirit bringing private and public sector together, to work in partnership, is a key to the future of the Isle of Man, and dare I suggest, to other places too.

For us, space for economic development also involves gaining the understanding of the outside world that what we do as an international business centre is not only legitimate but is complementary to other economies. To give an unfashionable but valid example, the Isle of Man feeds billions of pounds into the City of London every year, which in turn supports the wider UK economy.

Developing the Island as a successful centre for international business has meant engaging with evolving international standards in respect of financial regulation and taxation. This we have done positively and proactively, securing a reputation for the Isle of Man as a nation that is both enterprising and internationally responsible in promoting the economic interests of its people. We have been at the forefront of independent financial centres, concluding tax information exchange agreements with OECD countries to combat those who would seek to abuse our jurisdiction and harm our Island's reputation for the purpose of tax evasion.

As a small player on a very big global stage, we know that we cannot hope to prosper in isolation. We have to work with international bodies and, closer to home, work with and learn from our neighbours in what we sometimes call the 'adjacent islands'.

As a former member of the BIPA, I know that the working together and the learning that you all get from working with each other is what organisations like the British Irish Parliamentary Assembly are all about. I am aware of the valuable work that you do and have done over many years, and how much that has helped improve a lot of what we all stand for.

So again, Co-Chairman, may I welcome the Assembly here to the Island and wish you a most successful and enjoyable Plenary meeting here on the Isle of Man.

Gura mie eu. Thank you. *[Applause.]*

The Co-Chairman (The Lord Cope):

Thank you very much indeed. That was a most interesting and useful talk. The Chief Minister has agreed to ask — or answer, rather, one or two questions. The first one appears to be from Baroness Harris of Richmond.

Baroness Harris:

Chief Minister, thank you very much indeed for allowing some questions. My question was about the consultation between the British government and the Isle of Man, and indeed other Crown dependencies, on issues like VAT and the sharing of that particular problem.

The Chief Minister:

Thank you for that. I hope you are happy for me to sit here. I actually liked the introduction where Lord Cope said I was going to ask the questions. The point that I am answering them is maybe more challenging.

Can I just say that, certainly, there is no doubt that there was serious concern in the Isle of Man about the lack of any consultation by the United Kingdom government last year, when they in fact came and just told us they were going to reduce the VAT.

We did of course endeavour to get to a stage which was at least manageable from our point of view and eventually there was an agreement that we could spread that reduction over two financial years, £50 million per year, till we got to the £100 million reduction.

There are, on occasions, difficulties. Most of the time we have a good relationship with the United Kingdom government, as we do with the assemblies and in fact with the Irish government. Our link naturally constitutionally with the UK government is quite strong, in terms of how we have to deal with matters.

I think it is interesting that the select committee report, which was undertaken into the Ministry of Justice, actually highlighted for us some of these issues of how we deal with Whitehall, and it certainly is something that we are very, very strongly in favour of, getting a better relationship and understanding with the different departments of the United Kingdom government.

These things are partnerships, and I think our disappointment is that, on occasion, they are not recognised as a partnership, and then we have to deal with an issue from a stance that the decision has already been made. I think that is unhelpful and it does not build good relationships. It puts us under pressure.

Thank you.

Mr Robert Walter MP:

Thank you, Chief Minister. A number of us were involved in the... I would not say 'discussion', because I am not sure there was much discussion, over the cancellation of the reciprocal health care arrangements with the United Kingdom. That combined with the VAT changes – do you think that the Isle of Man would actually be better off if it pursued a more independent attitude to these issues or were you net beneficiaries, in the sense of both the VAT and the health care arrangements?

The Chief Minister:

Thank you for that. Clearly, the reciprocal health agreement, just taking that one first, was a very difficult period for us. We had been told again that that was to cease, and we have quite a strong link with the United Kingdom. We spend something like £10 million a year in the north-west for referrals that we send to the UK, and we were of course quite keen to retain that

agreement. Our problem was the difficulties which you are all aware of, in trying to get the UK government at the time to actually just talk about the issue to try and find a way forward.

We do appreciate the support of this organisation, the Association and its members. Members individually, a lot of whom are from Westminster, whether in the Lords or in the Commons, did a lot of work behind the scenes which we cannot do in the same way, to try and make sure we could take this forward. We also recognise the work of our own members, and also the public not only in the Isle of Man, but in the UK and especially in the north-west.

So yes, it was an unfortunate situation. We are delighted that it has been retained. It is going to cost us some money to retain that, but it is a cost that we think is worth paying. It is also beneficial to both parties, both the UK and the Isle of Man and to their residents.

As far as the issue of independence is concerned, quite clearly the Isle of Man's view is that we are content to remain a Crown dependency. We have all the internal independence that we need, apart from going to a full sovereign state. Certainly, we are very much of the thinking – and have been now for a long time – of promoting greater direct involvement ourselves in dealing with matters overseas, not only in the UK but also in the EU.

We are looking to develop an office in Brussels, along with our colleagues in the other Crown dependencies, who actually I think have opened theirs now. We are looking to have a stronger presence in the United Kingdom and to work more closely with the Irish Republic and their government to see how we can take things forward, where there may be some beneficial ways forward for both countries.

As far as the issue of the relationship generally, I think we have to put into context. Generally, we have a good relationship. I have to say, sometimes it depends on the politics of the UK, which influences whether that relationship is strong or not; but at the end of the day, what it comes down to is trust. If the two parties cannot trust each other and they do not act fairly or honestly, that makes the job far more difficult. Our view has always been to take a pragmatic view in dealing with issues which certainly cause concern to the UK or the other way round. All we ask for is to be treated fairly. Our problem is when we have difficulty in getting a response, when we have difficulty getting representation directly government to government,

which is rare, but it can happen with the departments in Westminster. The MoJ is fine. We have no problem with them; access to them is really very good.

What came out of the report that was done by the UK select committee was that we need to be able to develop – not us, but the UK do – stronger links with individual departments, so that there is a better understanding of our relationship and how we should work together more closely.

So I hope that answers the question. Thank you.

The Co-Chairman (The Lord Cope):

Thank you very much. Are there any further questions that anybody would like to ask of the Chief Minister? Yes, Joe Benton.

Mr Joe Benton MP:

Thanks Co-Chairman. Just as a matter of interest, I am a member of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, and currently – some of my colleagues are here, the Chair and other members – we are doing an inquiry at the moment into corporation tax. I am not quite sure what the level is, in terms of the Isle of Man, but we are considering a request by the Northern Ireland Assembly for parity with the south. Of course, it is a very important question.

So my question would be are there any implications in that, if it were to be granted, for the Isle of Man, if parity was to come about between north and south of Ireland?

Secondly, would it have an effect on the Isle of Man economy? I do not know what your current rate is. Do you have any observations at all about that particular request and our deliberations on it and what would be repercussions for the Isle of Man, if any?

The Chief Minister:

Thank you for that. I think, quite clearly, any agreement between two countries of a tax regime for corporation tax or any other tax clearly is a matter of agreement between those countries.

We are very conscious that we are very small, competing in a very large world. Our present corporation tax is a zero rate – I hasten to add, only for corporations and not individuals, unfortunately! It is a zero rate and that has enabled us to attract businesses into the British Isles that would not normally be within the British Isles area. We get the benefit from that, in terms of employment and funds being managed through the Isle of Man, which are still upstreamed into the UK.

I think we are always conscious that what may happen round our area, with devolution, any changes that happen there, with agreements between the north and south and just generally in the UK – who have been reducing their corporation tax, so I think it will reduce one of their levels – is bound to have an effect on the Isle of Man. We take the point that we are in the real world, we have to just compete and deal with that the best we can.

The Co-Chairman (The Lord Cope):

Thank you. Andrew Rosindell.

Mr Andrew Rosindell MP:

Thank you, Lord Cope. Chief Minister, it is a pleasure to be here back in the Isle of Man and I would like to thank you for your support for the co-operation between the United Kingdom and the Isle of Man, particularly through the British Manx Group in the UK Parliament.

My question is this: the Isle of Man, together with the United Kingdom, participates in the Commonwealth. The Crown dependencies unfortunately do not have equal status within the Commonwealth. Do you believe that, firstly, it is time for the Crown dependencies to have equal status to other countries within the Commonwealth?

Secondly, do you think that maybe it could be a possibility for Ireland to also consider membership of the Commonwealth in the years ahead? *[Laughter.]*

The Chief Minister:

Nothing controversial there, anyway. I know Andrew well and I appreciate the support and, in fact, the support we get from the Group. We had a very good AGM this year, where we were able to attract a lot of new members, which is important to us. Certainly, I want to make the point that whilst we are not part of the United Kingdom, we very much value our links with the United Kingdom, in terms of how we operate and how we have a lot of similarities. Of course, the Queen is one of those main points as to why we have this connection.

As far as the Commonwealth is concerned, of course, we are not a sovereign state. I think it is difficult for the Commonwealth to recognise those who are not sovereign states in the same way as they would recognise a sovereign state; but I do think, on the other side of it, there are occasions when the point we are not a sovereign state should not necessarily work against us, in certain areas of recognition.

I know, Co-Chairman, that Andrew is one of the ones who, with the Group, has been pushing for certain aspects of greater recognition for us. Our people have been very much involved in what is going on in the British Isles and the world, especially the western world, over the last hundred years plus. We had a lot of people who sacrificed their lives in two World Wars – proportionally very high. We have people presently fighting, out serving in Afghanistan, and they did in Iraq. So we have people very much involved in the British way of life, like everybody else. However, I do think we have to recognise that there is a slight difference in our status, and I think our biggest problem is getting people to really understand that the Crown dependencies are an integral part of the British Isles, and therefore, whilst we might have these what some would deem as peculiarities, because of how we have evolved, in fact we are still very important to the British Isles and vice versa.

The Co-Chairman (The Lord Cope):

We must begin to draw this question session to a close, but Seymour Crawford.

Mr Seymour Crawford TD:

Thank you very much, Co-Chair.

My question is somewhat different and something to do with your own domestic situation. Some years ago, when I was here before, you were just in the process of building a power station to deal with your waste. How has that worked out and are you happy that you went down that road?

The Chief Minister:

It is nice to see you again, Seymour. While I was on the Association, we used to talk quite a bit about this. I remember you coming to the Island some years ago, I think on one of the seminars.

Quite clearly from our point of view, the plant, the actual incinerator, has been a very valuable investment for us. I am a former Minister of Local Government and the Environment and spent nearly five years of that time – and I suppose 15 years before that – desperately trying to find places to dispose of our refuse. Nobody wants a tip near them. Whilst there was concern about having an incinerator, we did adopt voluntarily the then latest EU standards for emissions and we invested a substantial amount of money to provide what we need for the Island. It has been beneficial. It does generate an amount of electricity. There have been some hiccups along the way, in terms of the equipment, but I understand that has now settled down. I think we would be in really quite dire straits, if we did not have an incinerator, because we would not have proper facilities for disposal of waste landfills, and we cannot export our waste because we have a responsibility to deal with it here on the Island.

So yes, it has been a good investment, and it was the right thing to do.

The Co-Chairman (The Lord Cope):

Senator Geraldine Feeney.

Senator Geraldine Feeney:

Thank you. Very briefly, can I ask you, Chief Minister, would you have any idea how much Irish money is held here in the Island? *[Laughter.]*

The Chief Minister:

The honest answer is no; but I would hope it is helping benefit Irish citizens. *[Laughter.]*

Senator Geraldine Feeney:

Thank you. Can I ask, would you even hazard a guess – or can I be so bold as to ask you that?

The Chief Minister:

No, I have been too long in politics to hazard a guess on such a question! But seriously, I really do not know. For my sins, I have never been in Treasury, thank goodness, and I do not really know that figure.

It is an important part of our infrastructure. We do have banks here, but again, it should all be legitimate because of our stance on dealing with how people invest in the Isle of Man. We really are a facility so that people can then use that money to invest elsewhere and help the economies of both Britain and Ireland. So hopefully it is of benefit to all of us.

The Co-Chairman (The Lord Cope):

Last question, Lord Dubs.

The Lord Dubs:

I was just going to ask, could you comment on your relationship with the European Union? It is something that I have never really understood, and you mentioned adhering to EU standards on the waste.

The Chief Minister:

Right. It is an interesting relationship. When the UK joined the EU, the Crown dependencies agreed to have then what we called a protocol – Protocol 3 which gave us access to trade with the EU. So, that allows us to trade with the UK, Southern Ireland and with Europe in its widest context. So when we are manufacturing, when we are exporting food or whatever, we have to comply with EU regulations and standards. We have no room on that: we have to comply.

Take the incinerator: because that has nothing to do with the EU, it is just ours and it only affects the people of the Isle of Man, we could have built an incinerator of very poor quality of standard. But voluntarily we adopted their standards, because we have not got the ability or the

expertise to develop our own standards. We then looked for the best standards and we saw the best standards being those in the EU.

The same happens for water quality. We do not have to cease discharging into our seas, but we voluntarily have undertaken a programme which has been going now for about 12 years. At the moment, we have invested about £150 million ceasing to discharge sewage into our bays. Because of it, we have cleaned up our water standards and we have cleaned our beaches.

So in those areas where we have to comply, which is to trade, but the other areas are voluntary, and we do adopt them when we think it is appropriate.

One of the problems we do have under the Protocol is that whilst we can trade, we cannot trade in services, so that is a problem with how the world has changed over a period since 1970 or 1971.

So that I hope explains it.

The Lord Dubs:

Can I just ask you, why do you not join the EU as full members?

The Chief Minister:

Well, wiser men than me have said that there is not a big advantage to us, in terms that we are so small. It might mean that we would not be able to have the flexibility that we have today, which is part of what I have just described, really.

I suppose it is a question that will be re-examined over time. I know it has been re-examined in the last 10 years and will continue to be. I suppose the answer is that when we feel it really is something that we need to do, we might well try to do that. We would need the support, of course, of the United Kingdom.

The Co-Chairman (The Lord Cope):

Well, colleagues, I am sure you will agree that the last half hour listening to the Chief Minister has given us all a much better appreciation of why the Isle of Man is so well run and that is because it has such high quality people running it, particularly the Chief Minister himself.

Members: Hear, hear. *[Applause.]*

The Co-Chairman (The Lord Cope):

So, thank you very much indeed, Tony, for joining us this morning. We are looking forward to seeing you this evening at our dinner – not too far from here!

The Chief Minister:

Not too far from here.

The Co-Chairman (The Lord Cope):

Thank you very much indeed for joining us, and thank you for welcoming us to your lovely Island for this session of our Assembly. Thank you.

The Chief Minister:

Thank you — my pleasure. *[Applause.]*

ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE NORDIC COUNCIL

The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):

Colleagues, we will swiftly move on to the next item on the agenda, the address by the President of the Nordic Council. Can I ask the President to make his way to the stage here.

Could I say that President Hjørvar, this year, is President of the Nordic Council. He was first elected to the Icelandic parliament in 2003 and first elected as Chairman of the Committee on the Economy and Taxation. He was elected to the Nordic Council in 2007. Can I say, President, you are very welcome and I ask you to address us, please. *[Applause]*

The President of the Nordic Council (Mr Helgi Hjørvar):

Thank you. I always like to stress Chairman of Economy and Taxation *after* the crisis in Iceland.

Thank you for this opportunity and for inviting me. I believe it has been some time since the President of the Nordic Council has addressed your Assembly, but I am here because I believe strongly that we can increase and strengthen the co-operation between the Nordic Council and the British Irish Parliamentary Assembly, and should do so.

Before I go to that, I would like to thank the Manx for the hospitality they have shown and I must say that in this old Viking stronghold an Icelander finds himself a little at home. Tynwald is, of course, the same name as in Icelandic – Thingvellir – which is the name of our national park and where our parliament was founded in the same century as it was here in the Isle of Man, and Snæfell is, as well, the mountain back home. So one tends to ask himself, when he looks at the beautiful surroundings here in the Isle of Man, why did we ever leave?

We just recently had our session, the Nordic Council, up in Iceland with almost a thousand delegates, and there is very much going on in the co-operation in the Nordic Council. It has an enormous support from the people of the Nordic countries – 80% support in the Nordic countries, and 60% of the people in the Nordic countries want more Nordic co-operation. The reason is, basically, that we have succeeded in creating a somewhat borderless world and increased tourism and cultural exchange and all kinds of activities within the region that have led to economic prosperity that has been felt by both the business in the Nordic and by the people.

Now, since the world is always getting smaller, we consider it actual to try and do between regions what we have in the past done within regions. We have, in the latest years, been emphasising on co-operating with our neighbouring regions, such as the Baltic countries,

the Russians, and the Benelux, and I hope that we will be increasing the co-operation we have had with you here in the north-west. We have many things that we have in common, both historically, of course, in our democracy tradition, business relations etc, and we have a whole range of things that we could and should work on and try to solve as well.

We have, in the Nordic co-operation, been focusing very much in recent years on defence and security issues: amongst them, search and rescue operations in the waters north of here. We have been focusing on human security and co-operation against organised crime and areas like that. We have been focusing on the oil harvesting north of the British Isles, which is in Nordic seas in many cases. There are explorations in Greenland, the Faroes, in Iceland to come and in Norway, of course, but being done by British companies time and time again, and where we have common interests in the economic benefits from the oil harvesting and from avoiding the economic catastrophes we can have there, if we do not co-operate and exchange expertise in those areas as much as we can.

Then we are, in this day and age, focusing on the green sector, on building renewable energy sources. Since in the recession, we realise that the green sector is an enormous opportunity, having a turnover of some £400 billion sterling a year and being, in times of economic trouble, growing year from year, from 6% to 13%, and thus creating job opportunities and business opportunities more than, I believe, any other sector in the world, and at the same time solving the environmental challenges that we are faced with as politicians. There, the Nordic countries, with their renewable resources, and the situation of Britain as an international financial centre could of course play a role in strengthening one another's position in the area.

Then, of course, one felt a little at home yesterday when the situation in Ireland was clear. Some said, two years ago, that the difference between Ireland and Iceland was one letter and six months, but they turned out to be much more resilient in Ireland and they have now gone two years and their crises are much less than ours and we do believe and hope that they will come out of them fast and furiously and stronger than before. We have learned, being there for two years, that crises do also imply opportunities – opportunities in resetting your values, in cutting your losses, in sharpening the edges – and get you in shape to be up and running again, and that in itself can be positive.

But what has happened in the financial sector in recent years – for instance the Icesave case, that was quite a case between the UK and Iceland – shows that we have cross-border conflicts arising from the financial sector all the time, cross-border problems, and I believe it calls for us to strengthen our cross-border co-operation in order to be able to solve them, because by the end of the day and when the “banksters” have gone far, far away, then there are only our taxpayers to pay for the problems that we did not prevent.

We have, in that area, had regional co-operation with our friends in the east, the Baltic countries. We have now an agreement on financial stability in the area, because we learnt that financial instability there influenced our own countries. We have also had co-operation with many of you concerning tax information – exchange of information from the Isle of Man since 2007 and Jersey and Guernsey as well. We are thankful for that and we do believe that we can increase our co-operation in that sector.

Then, last but not least, we are focusing more and more on co-operation with the EU. In the north-western part of Europe, there are some 15 countries and more than 10 votes in the EU – hopefully, one more when Iceland becomes a member – and we, of course, share a lot of interests and can learn from one another and can work with one another in influencing that body. We have, for instance, had co-operation in the Nordics and with the Baltics as well concerning new legislation in the EU on consumer rights, and I presume that we in the northern part of Europe are used to higher standards of consumer rights and that there is fear that consumer rights will not be the same if we have legislation over all of Europe.

The EU is working on a North Sea strategy and I believe that is something that we could influence from your side, from our side and from the Benelux side, and should do. We have influenced their strategy in the Baltic Sea area and that was a successful co-operation there in the region. I do hope that in that, and in many other areas, we can increase our co-operation, but we are first and foremost here to learn from you and not least to learn how you work with EU issues on your committees and in your work, because even though the Nordic countries are some members of the EU and some not, we realise that our market is shaped by EU legislation

and our societies are influenced by them, and we want to do our utmost to influence them from our side and co-operate with as many as we can in doing that.

Thank you. *[Applause.]*

ECONOMY

The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):

I thank President Hjörvar for his address and words of wisdom on the economy and the difficulties that all of us face in the current financial times.

We move to the debate on the economy that was agreed by our Steering Committee this morning. I invite Margaret Conlon to make an opening address.

Mrs Margaret Conlon TD:

Thank you, Co-Chairman. As all delegates are aware, yesterday the Irish Government decided to apply to the European Union authorities for financial assistance. The EU authorities have agreed to that request. Now a period of negotiation will commence; it is expected to come to finality in the next few weeks.

Our Government has adopted a strategy and will build on actions that have already been taken to restructure the banks and to reduce our budget deficit. In fixing our problems, we recognised that there is a great need to get our banks into shape. We need to have a properly functioning banking system in order to have a properly functioning economy. Credit is the lifeblood of any business—we need to have banks lending. A comprehensive range of measures, including restructuring of the banking sector, will contribute to ensuring that the system performs its role in the functioning of the economy.

We also need to get our budget deficit reduced. We cannot continue to operate at current levels—that is unsustainable into the future. Every action that our Government has taken over

the past few years has been predicated on that. To continue with those actions, we needed a source of funds. One such source was the international bond markets. Over the past while, we have seen that they are irrational and unpredictable, so that source became prohibitively expensive for us. That was a problem not just for Ireland but for the euro zone, and was recognised not just by us but by the European Central Bank and European leaders.

The euro zone decided that, rather than have Governments and banks reliant on ad hoc access to the ECB and an unstable bond market, it would put together a large fund to give Governments and banks access to alternative sources of funds. The international bodies—the EU Commission, the ECB and the International Monetary Fund—would provide funding in a very difficult funding environment so that we could continue to take the correct actions. The IMF would provide technical support to the EU, which has not been in this position before. A major fund would be provided so that we would not be reliant on the bond markets. The hope is that, when they see that an alternative source of funds is available, their prices may fall.

The bodies concerned are providing support to bring stability to our financial system. That stability is essential to protect the real economy, which is recovering and growing. This year exports will increase by more than 6 %. Multinational domestic companies have been growing their exports. Industrial production is very strong and was up 12 % on the year at the end of September. The traditional, mainly Irish-owned, sectors—most notably the food sector—are also performing well, and unemployment has fallen for the past two months. We must protect those positives in the real economy as they will allow us to recover and to protect and create jobs. Given the recognition that Ireland has taken the correct action, interventions on our fiscal policies should be limited.

We have the solidarity of our partners in Europe. We welcome the supportive statements made in recent days by Prime Minister Cameron, Chancellor Merkel, President Sarkozy and others, including the leaders of European institutions. Ireland's membership of the European Union has transformed our country for the better, and we are profoundly grateful for the solidarity that Europe has shown with us since the financial crisis began. That support is one of the benefits of being a member of the EU.

People are worried about the conditions that might be imposed. That will only be a concern if we, as a Government, do not take the right course of action. Our Government has taken corrective action and it is widely recognised that we are on the right road. That will continue with the publication later this week of the four-year recovery plan.

There is also a lot of idle talk about loss of sovereignty. That is not an issue, because we will do what we pledged to do in the first place. We will continue to be responsible for our own economy and to take the necessary corrective action so that there is no threat to our sovereignty.

We are not the first country in the world—and we will not be the last—to run into such a situation. We are aware that our nearest neighbour, Britain, had recourse to the International Monetary Fund in 1976, and it emerged a stronger and better country. After such an event, people always think that the like will never happen again, but external aid is not the bogeyman that people make it out to be, and other countries will look for assistance in future.

Ireland is still doing well with foreign direct investment per capita. We are attracting the most foreign direct investment of any country in the world. Our exports are back to 90 % of what they were before the crisis began, and our balance of payments is very healthy.

As the Taoiseach said last night, we should not underestimate the scale of the crisis, but we must have faith in our ability as a people to recover and prosper once more. We are grateful for the support and help of our partners, but we will rebuild the economy ourselves. Our four-year plan will be published later this week, and we will have our budget on 7 December. We will show solidarity with our country, and we reassure people that all those decisions have been taken in the best interests of Irish taxpayers. We are still a great country with a great future.

Mr Brian Hayes TD:

It is important to discuss this matter today as parliamentarians rather than Governments because of the severe difficulty in which the country finds itself right now. I appreciate the fact that the Steering Committee has provided this short debate.

The first thing that must be said is that we must find a way out of the fiscal and banking crisis that is affecting the country and the euro. Leaving the issue unresolved would have had a detrimental effect on the relationship between Britain and Ireland. We welcome the positive statements that have been issued by the Prime Minister and by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, who made it clear that Britain is prepared to provide bilateral loan facilities to Ireland should that become a necessity. The Chancellor made the point that the trade connection between Britain and Ireland is colossal, as are the clear ties of friendship, industry and commerce, which go back many years.

There is another obvious reason why the British and Irish Governments can work on the issue with our partners in Europe—the banking issue. In September, the Bank for International Settlements reported that, of the €720 billion outstanding public, private and corporate debt in Ireland, €155 billion is effectively British debt. The severe challenges that the country faces are challenges that we all have to resolve collectively. The solidarity with us that the British Government has shown of late is very welcome indeed.

The four-year plan will be published shortly. It is, mercifully, one year shorter than Stalin's plan, but will nonetheless offer some hope to the country as we wrestle with the difficulties that we face.

It is also important to say that there is cross-party consensus, certainly among the bigger parties, on reaching the 3 % deficit target by 2014, irrespective of who is in government. That sends out a strong international signal that, even if there is a change of Government, which there probably will be sooner rather than later, we have made an international commitment and are clear that the deficit issue in Ireland must be resolved. The current difference between expenditure and tax is around €19 billion. In percentage terms, the current budget deficit is not that different from that of the United Kingdom, but we have seen how a new Government in the UK, with a five-year term and a clear plan for how it intends to reduce the deficit, has sent out positive messages to the international bond market. We can see the equivalent in Ireland.

The point must be made that Ireland is being held back because of the banking liability and some pretty disastrous decisions on bank policy that have been taken in the past two and a half

years. However, the fiscal position will be corrected, and we still have 1.8 million people at work. By comparison, the Portuguese and the Spanish have much higher unemployment rates than we have. We have a very good export base, which has grown significantly in the past two years, and our cost competitiveness is much better than it was two years ago. Ireland is not Greece. The structural changes in public sector pay in the past two years have begun to correct our budget imbalance. We can get over the difficulty if we use the support of our colleagues in the European Union and locally to ensure that the economy is restructured, and we can move on.

The deficit issues in the Republic and Northern Ireland provide the north and the south with a new opportunity for greater co-operation, particularly on public services. We must effectively recalibrate our public services to get greater value for money in the north and the south, and use those services in a shared way for our people north and south of the border. It seems that there are enormous opportunities, particularly in health care, for greater co-operation to emerge.

Obviously, the past week, and the past 24 hours in particular, have been dramatic in the Republic, but I think that we can come out of the difficulty with the twin objectives of continued solidarity and continued economic growth. The solidarity in this Body, with the new relationships that we have forged since the Agreement in Northern Ireland, is the kind of solidarity that will help us to get over the very difficult issues and problems that affect our country right now.

Mr Barry McElduff MLA:

I want to change the tone slightly. I think that the European Union and International Monetary Fund bailout is shameful—I have to say that. Inviting the IMF in to run the economy is a shameful route for any state to take. It robs the state of its economic sovereignty, and it is a reflection of a failure of Government. I want to say that strongly.

It is not a bailout for the Irish people—and people are angry about this the length and breadth of Ireland. It will not secure social welfare or protect public sector wages or the provision of education; it will be money for the Government to continue to pursue its banking policy.

There is a tremendous mood in Ireland for an immediate general election. There will be a by-election later this week in Donegal South-West—your county, Co-Chairman Blaney—and I believe that the writing is on the wall for the current Government.

I want to add briefly to the words of Brian Hayes. The island of Ireland, with 6 million people, has two states and two systems of everything, including administration. Duplication of public services in a small island of 6 million people does not make any sense. The effects of partition are ruining our economy, north and south.

Thank you, Co-Chairman.

Mr Paul Murphy MP:

I will not comment on whether there should be an election in Ireland—that is not my business—but I will say something about the common difficulties that now face our two countries. This Body has a particularly important role to play in ensuring that the Parliaments and Assemblies of all the islands that are gathered here have a common cause.

I know that there is a difference of emphasis between the parties. Everybody accepts that there is a deficit in Britain, and everybody accepts that there is a deficit in Ireland, but there are different views on how we deal with them. As those who represent areas of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland know, the First Ministers of those countries came together to say that they were troubled by how the deficit process is being dealt with. However, that is an argument for another time and another place.

The loan from the British Government—which I understand is about £7 billion—is precisely that. I have no doubt that the resilience of the Irish people will eventually mean that the loan is returned. As Brian Hayes rightly said, our relations in trading and banking, the fact that our cultural and political interests are very much the same, and the fact that Northern Ireland and

the Republic of Ireland work so closely together on economic matters mean that we as British politicians have to stand by our Irish friends.

That is the end of it. To be perfectly honest, I have no patience with colleagues of mine in the British Parliament who say that the loan should not happen. I am delighted that the Chancellor of the Exchequer said what he said this morning. I think that it represents the overwhelming view of British parliamentarians because, unless this happens in friendship between our two countries, no one will benefit, whereas everyone will benefit from joint co-operation and the fact that we are so closely intertwined.

I welcome what the British Government has said, and I welcome the European Union intervention. We stand together on these issues—let no one doubt that—and I think that this Body has an important role to play.

Thank you, Co-Chairman.

Dr Alasdair McDonnell MLA MP:

I welcome the opportunity for an open discussion because the stresses in the Irish economy affect Northern Ireland perhaps more than most. There is a deep interdependence, and we in Northern Ireland are very vulnerable because of a high dependence on public expenditure. Planned cuts in our budget in Northern Ireland will make things difficult, and there is a deep worry that the problems in the Irish Republic will add to our difficulties.

Our interdependence is significant. On a wider scale, I express my deep appreciation for the genuine honesty and support of the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, and for their recognition of the interdependence of the Irish and British economies. The latter point was well made by none other than Prince Charles at the Irish embassy recently, when he said that Britain's trade with Ireland was three times Britain's trade with China. Times may be difficult for our Southern Irish colleagues, but the seeds of a lot of goodwill and potential are coming out of the situation, and the attitude of the Prime Minister and the chancellor has been very positive.

I urge Southern Irish colleagues here not to talk up the issue or overindulge in it. To be honest, it is bad, but there is no point in making it worse, and any temptation to win minor advantage here or there is not helpful.

There was an issue with casino banking, and I welcome Margaret Conlon's comments about the underlying strength of the economy with regard to new jobs, investment and productivity. We are all fully aware that casino banking led to a banking crisis, which in turn—although the underlying fundamentals of the economy are strong—has led to a financial and liquidity crisis that is causing a serious lack of confidence.

We in Northern Ireland are stuck somewhere in the middle, and we are perhaps more vulnerable than most. We need a strong Irish economy, and I would be grateful for and appreciative of the understanding of our Irish and British friends. Thank you.

Mr Robert Walter MP:

I welcome the debate. If we can do anything this morning, we should emphasise the interdependence of our two economies. It was said last week that Britain's trade with Ireland is greater than its collective trade with the BRIC—Brazil, Russia, India and China—economies. As some cynics went on to point out, that is only 6 %. However, that statement misses the point, which is that the economic interdependence between North and South is probably the most critical when we consider the situation from a British perspective. Economic failure in the South would lead to an economic crisis in the North, and that would be very much a problem for the United Kingdom and the United Kingdom taxpayer in trying to deal with and rectify that situation.

We must be clear that the crisis in Ireland has not been caused by Ireland's membership of the euro. The euro puts significant constraints on the country in finding a solution but, as a bit of an old-fashioned monetarist, I think that that is probably a good thing. If Ireland had simply devalued its way out of the problem, the long-term effect on the economy would have been devastating, particularly for the financial sector, due to the loss of confidence that would have resulted. It would have taken many decades to rebuild that kind of confidence, not least in relation to direct investment in Ireland.

The Irish Government was the first of the eurozone countries to react in a decisive way, which was right. The British Government's actions to reduce the deficit in recent months have been correct. Today's actions by the Irish Government and its European partners are absolutely right.

We all have to get our public finances in order, but we also have to look at restructuring our banking industry. I do not believe that we need more regulation, but we need better supervision of what banks are doing. That starts with better internal supervision and better corporate governance in our banks. I am afraid that many boards of directors in our banks were happy that they were all making lots of money and thought that they did not really need to question how they were making that money. They believed that it would upset the apple cart if they questioned too much what the very smart traders were doing. Of course, the very smart traders were not totally smart, but the directors of the banks were even less smart. We have to engender a new element of good corporate governance in our banks and good supervision of our banking system.

I wish all our Irish friends good luck, because they have a tough couple of months before them. The debate shows that there is solidarity in these islands in collectively coming to a conclusion and dealing with the problem.

Mr Kris Hopkins MP:

As a newly elected Conservative MP who has not been a particularly enthusiastic supporter of the euro, I am wary, because there is an opportunity to gloat, but that would not be appropriate, because a neighbour and a very good friend is in a moment of crisis and trouble. It is appropriate that we stand with Ireland and support it through the process.

Ireland is an extremely important trading partner. We have a common border, as George Osborne said today. We need to help both economies, as they are vulnerable as a consequence of the situation. Each state must take responsibility for its problems. Ireland will go through the appropriate electoral process to make choices about its leadership. However, outside the political debate, there is an individual responsibility to look at how we maximise things such as education, skills and enterprise. We are culturally, historically and geographically linked, so we have an opportunity to promote that through the media and various institutions. If we do not

get education, skills and enterprise right, we cannot compete globally. Because we are linked so closely geographically and historically, we have an opportunity to enhance the contributions to that from the two Governments far more effectively.

Earlier, we had a debate about the Saville report and bloody Sunday. Despite the tragedy of that event, there is an opportunity to use some of the new-found connectivity and good faith that have come out of the dialogue and debate. It is important that we build on things such as the support that George Osborne and David Cameron have given and the good faith that is being exercised around the room today. I have said before that, although there is a conversation in this room and a conversation between those who are affected by things such as bloody Sunday, there is fairly limited dialogue in mainland UK about how we can further maximise our potentials. The conversation has to step outside this room and our Parliaments and into the streets, pubs and businesses of our countries.

Mr Seymour Crawford TD:

I welcome the opportunity to speak on this difficult subject which, when we last met, we certainly did not think would be on the agenda. However, we are where we are. There is no point in going back through the reasons for that. I, too, welcome the commitment of the British Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. I know from experience that we can expect nothing different from the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Owen Paterson, who has been a good friend to me for many years. As Robert Walter said, the situation lacked proper supervision and proper work by directors, who sat idly by and allowed much of what has happened to take place. However, as Margaret Conlon and others have said, we still have a vibrant economy that has major exports.

It is important—and it is the reason why I felt I should speak—to note that we have major links with the UK market and especially with people immediately across the border in Northern Ireland. I served on the board of Town of Monaghan co-operative for quite a long time. At the minute, 20 % of its business is in County Monaghan and 80 % is north of the border. Kerry co-op down in the bottom of the country also has major investment in Northern Ireland, as has the

Goodman group. I mention the food industry because I know it best and I was involved in the meat board for many years.

We need to ensure the vital economic link. I thank again the Prime Minister, the chancellor and others and our EU colleagues. Unlike the previous speaker, I am enthusiastic about our involvement in the EU and in the euro. I say that because of personal experience. In the 1980s, we were an independent economy and we were in difficulties. I and others paid a rate of 23 % on long-term borrowing for a period. We might argue that the interest rate ran too low for a time and perhaps caused some of our current problems, but I assure Members that, if we were an independent economy in the present situation, our interest rates would be unsustainable.

The EU is important, and our friendship and our trading involvement with the UK are extremely important. We just have to try to ensure that proper plans are in place to get us back to some sort of normality in the shortest time. As my colleague Brian Hayes said, as the main Opposition party, Fine Gael has taken a proactive approach. We agreed about the necessity for a four-year plan and for the 3 % basis, which was agreed with the EU. Whenever the election takes place and whatever its result is, I have no doubt that the person who is in charge will proceed with the four-year plan and the guarantees that have been given to Europe.

Senator Donie Cassidy:

Go raibh maith agat, a Chathaoirligh. We are where we are on this historic day in our country's history. I lived through two massive recessions in the 1970s and 1980s and, looking back, we must say that becoming a member of the EU has stood us well in Ireland. As we all know, the huge benefits that we have received from structural funds, cohesion funds and all the other funding that has brought our country up to a par in our infrastructure have brought us on in leaps and bounds over many years.

We have proved over the years that we are a resilient people. We have achieved an enormous amount, particularly through education in the past 50 years. Irishmen and women are playing senior roles in management right across the world today.

We have been a very attractive destination for foreign direct investment in the past number of years—probably the most successful European country, particularly for a country of our size. We have achieved 7 % growth over 10 or 11 years in succession up until the past two years. We are victims of our own success in the sense that we need to have a massive correction in order to be competitive, because wages have been higher than in our neighbouring countries and that has put us at a disadvantage. However, we have to look at what went wrong and ask who let us down. It was not the politicians, it was not the EU and it was certainly not our friendly neighbours. It was our banking system.

As a long-standing Member of the Seanad and, before that, the Dáil, I have to say, fairly and squarely, that it was the governance of our banks that let us down—whether that was the central bank, the regulator, or whoever it was. We have been a trusting people in Parliament no matter who was in power. When executives came before the committees, which is an important part of our system in Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann, they gave their up-to-date reports to us. We have always accepted those as genuine, honest and decent. Unfortunately, we have now come to the conclusion, which we know to be fact, that untruths were told and we were misled. That is the biggest challenge that faces our Irish Government. I know that the Taoiseach and the Government have brought in corrective measures and that, hopefully, the situation is all done and dusted. However, the problem was because of the untruths and being so misled that we did not know what the end of the difficulties was. Now, through our own representatives, we are trying to find out what the bottom was.

Be that as it may, we are here today and everyone wants to see us going forward in a positive direction, no matter which party we represent or whether we are in government. There is never a wrong time to do the right thing. Given the experience that we have gained from the situation, I say to the IMF, the EU and to all who are coming to our assistance, that we will certainly do all that we can. Any undertakings that we give as a nation we will carry out to the letter of our commitment. Go raibh maith agat, a Chathaoirleach.

Mr Laurence Robertson MP:

I make it clear that I have no problem with the UK helping Ireland at this time. I also agree with my colleague Bob Walter, who called for a greater overseeing of the banking system and a great

improvement in corporate governance, which is what is greatly needed. However, I do not believe that it has been entirely a banking crisis; it has also been brought about by Government behaviour. We need to learn about that.

We are competing with different countries these days and with China and India in particular. As somebody who goes to Africa quite a bit, I think that we will be competing with Africa before too long. I have to ask the question: how are we going to compete? We have to understand that high taxes and unnecessary regulatory burden are not how we will compete and neither is building big Governments. The opposite of those approaches is how we will compete.

I greatly value the UK's trade with Ireland—I do not want that to be misunderstood—but, when I hear that we export more to 4.5 million people in Ireland than we do to a third of the world's population in China and India, it fills with me with a great deal of concern. We have not to reduce the trade with Ireland but to seek to increase massively our trade with other parts of the world. If we do not do that, our prosperity will begin to diminish, and we will send the UK, and Ireland, completely the wrong way.

The point that I want to make is that this is not just a banking crisis but a crisis of government, as I said a few moments ago. We built a debt culture. There is far too much personal and Government debt, and we have to rein it in. I am not a fan of the European Union at all, but I understand that there is guidance in Europe about how much debt countries should have. I welcome that and recommend that countries recognise it.

I wanted to make that one point succinctly and briefly: this is not just a banking crisis but a Government crisis. I am referring not just to Ireland but to the United Kingdom.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):

I call Terry Leyden.

Senator Terry Leyden:

Thank you, Co-Chairman, and congratulations, too, to your Co-Chairman, Lord Cope. I wish him success in his work.

It is rather strange and unreal to have received word of the situation in Ireland—that we will have a general election, probably at the end of January. We are at a very important Assembly, and the solidarity that has been shown here is very encouraging. The British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly is a great success story, and I hope that after the next general election it will continue as strongly as it has in the past.

We should bear it in mind that we have suffered 3,800 casualties during the Troubles in Northern Ireland. Through a combined effort by Britain and Ireland, our colleagues throughout this region and all the parties in Northern Ireland and the Republic—it has been a joint effort—the issue has been resolved. As a result, this Assembly exists and other developments have taken place. From that point of view, I am encouraged for the future.

I was a Minister in the 1980s when we had a serious situation. Inflation at that stage reached 18·5 %, and interest rates were 18·5 %. We have a crisis at the moment, but we are in the European Union and we also have the support of the British Government, for which we are most grateful. I am confident that we will work ourselves out of the situation and that the Opposition parties will adopt a responsible attitude to the issue. Indeed, they have done so in adopting the four-year programme of plans that has been proposed. The budget will go through on 7 December, and the agreement with the European Union and the International Monetary Fund will be in place before there is a general election. The people will then decide. That is their democratic right.

All I can say is that I wish all our colleagues here who will be contesting the election next year every success. I hope that they are returned to the Parliament because they have all been hard workers and they deserve to be re-elected. I wish them all success.

Baroness Harris:

I do not normally talk about money matters in this Body, but I think that today is significant. This Body has shown complete solidarity with our colleagues in the south of Ireland and has recognised the mutual failure to foresee the crisis of the lack of governance in both Government and banking.

The medicine has been agreed across the parties in the south of Ireland, and I am pleased about that. I know that an awful lot is going on behind the scenes, including talk about how the Government will carry on. I do not believe that this is a time when there should be any talk of general elections; it is a time to get heads down, to work hard and to ensure that the work can go on in order to come to a proper conclusion of the crisis.

It is worth remembering that £90 billion is tied up in private savings in the south of Ireland. That should demonstrate both to the EU and to all of us that the south of Ireland is certainly not in such a desperate state, when all that money is tied up in its private system. Perhaps the people of the south of Ireland will take heart from knowing that they have a base on which to build.

Mr John Robertson MP:

I would like to go back to talking about the people who are really going to suffer. It is a global problem—it is not just something to do with Ireland and the United Kingdom. The bankers caused the problem and we are suffering as a result of it. We must remember that we have to sell this measure to the ordinary people—particularly the constituents whom I represent, who are being asked to cut back. The poorest families, single-parent families and women, in particular, will all suffer more than the people who have money, although those are the people who caused the problem in the first place. We have to explain to them why, at a time when they face swingeing cuts, the United Kingdom is lending £7 billion.

We must all work together in sending out the message that there is a need for this, but in showing that need we must be compassionate and think about the people who will, ultimately, suffer. If we lend £7 billion to Ireland to help it out, it must come from somewhere—there will be another shortfall somewhere in the United Kingdom, where £7 billion will have to be found.

I believe that we, in this Body, have a duty to help each other as we do. It goes without saying that I accept the necessity to help Ireland and agree with everything that everyone else has said about that. However, I do not necessarily agree with some of the political points that have been made about it being down to Governments. Governments have done what they have felt to be

best at the time, and they have dealt with needs at that point. If we had introduced regulation years ago, as some people are saying we should have done, those same people would have been shouting from the tallest building that we were ruining the country and stifling investment. We must deal with the situation that we face at present and get on with it.

We must remember that there are real people involved in this, and that when this rolls down the hill, the people at the bottom are the ones who will get covered. We must remember that they are the people whom we represent. This is not about sustaining the banks; it is about sustaining people and making sure that they have enough money to buy food and to put a roof over their heads.

Mr Noel Treacy TD:

Thank you very much for the opportunity to participate in this debate.

It is important to say, at the outset, that Ireland has an open economy. We have been consistently dependent on exporting for, on average, 90 % of our gross domestic product throughout history.

Ireland and the UK have extensive trading links, the value of which is estimated to be about £55 billion per annum, which is a huge amount of money. Ireland is the UK's fourth-largest export destination and is the ninth-largest source of UK imports. The UK is Ireland's largest source of imports and third-largest export destination. The main imports from Ireland to the UK are food and drink products, medical and pharmaceutical products and software. The main UK exports to Ireland are petroleum and gas products, chemicals and pharmaceuticals, and textiles and clothing. Ireland is the ninth-largest investor in the United Kingdom. The UK is also the third-largest source of foreign investment into Ireland and is Ireland's largest tourism market.

Beyond the trade, investment and tourism statistics, the Irish and UK economies are deeply integrated. Many high-street brands are common to both economies, and there is a lot of co-operation in the fields of scientific research and renewable energy. Large brands are common to both of our countries.

Colleagues have spoken about the cross-party consensus in our country. The main traditional constitutional political parties on the island of Ireland fully subscribe to reducing our current debt from 11 % to 3 % by 2014. That is critically important. We are putting together a four-year plan that we will publish over the next week, after which our national budget will be announced on 7 December.

It is critically important that the constitutional political system and the parliamentary system in our country underpins the decisions that will be taken by Government to ensure that we can get back on to a solid pathway of recovery.

Back in 1987, when we returned to Government, the debt to GDP ratio was 120 %. Today, it is 60 %. Only 700,000 people were in employment at that time, now the figure is 1.7 million. We have much more capacity to carry this situation than ever before.

I have listened to what colleagues—particularly my good friend, Laurence Robertson—have said. When we joined the European Union in 1973, we were dependent—to a degree of 75 %—on the British market for our exports. Since then, we have quadrupled our exports to the United Kingdom, but they are only 20 % in volume terms of our total exports. If we had not joined the EU, we would today be much more dependent on the UK market. The opportunities that are created by our ability to enter a marketplace of 500 million people are critically important to the sustainability of our economy. That is an important situation.

Money is an international commodity and requirement. Of course, one does not really need to have money in one's pocket; one needs to have the use of that money. These are the challenges for Ireland right now: to have the use of the necessary resources; to manage our economy forward; to manage the intellectual talent of our people; to grow our economy; and to continue to be able to trade with all of our partners in the UK and the EU. We are deeply grateful for the international solidarity that is available to Ireland from the EU and the UK, and we sincerely thank Prime Minister Cameron and Chancellor Osborne for their positive statements, along with the statements from our colleagues in the European Union and the United States of America.

This is an international crisis, as Laurence Robertson said. There is a serious debt crisis around the world. There has been a major collapse of banks in the USA, the UK, Iceland, Japan and elsewhere. The big situation for Ireland is that we have not allowed any of our banks to collapse. Just over a year ago, the Government and the Parliament gave a bank guarantee and we renewed that guarantee last week. By and large, that is supported by a majority of right-thinking people in Parliament. Why did we do that? We did it because subsidiary financial institutions, insurance companies, credit unions, friendly societies and others had invested in our main banks and, if we did not give that guarantee, we would have written off the cash of the citizens of our country. In a sovereign republic, we could not allow that to happen.

For 30 years, our country and your country have been bedevilled by the violence in Northern Ireland, which has cost our exchequers billions. However, that shameful period of our history is now behind us, and both sovereign Governments have eroded that situation and brought us on to the path of peace, progress and prosperity. Due to the international ramifications of the global financial situation, we are now in a serious situation with which we have to deal. However, the solidarity of our partners, through this Assembly, through the EU and through our partnerships around the world, has given us the confidence that we have the capacity to deal with it. That is very important.

Ten years ago, we changed from absolute central bank control over all financial services to a new regulatory authority that embraced all financial services, with the central bank having a reduced role. That was a serious mistake, for which we are now paying the price. Our former Finance Minister and European Commissioner, Charlie McCreevy, was opposed to the move, but the majority rules and, in the democratic consensus that we achieved, decisions were taken.

As colleagues have said, regulation has somewhat broken down and we have a serious challenge with which to deal. However, we are dealing with it, and we have made major changes. Trust has broken down in the global financial world, and Ireland is a victim of that, as a very open economy. However, we are a sovereign republic, and I am a proud Irishman and a proud European. I am also a proud member of our national republican party, Fianna Fáil. As a citizen of a sovereign republic and as a professional politician for three decades, it is incumbent on me—as it is incumbent on all my colleagues in all parties in Parliament in Ireland who subscribe to the privilege of being a citizen in a sovereign republic—to publicly state that we

have never in our history welshed in debt, internationally or otherwise, and that we do not intend ever to do so. As Members of a sovereign republic, we will never do so.

We acknowledge the collaborative approach that has been taken and the commitment that has been displayed by countries around the world, including the UK, to ensuring that we continue to be an open and solid trading economy with a deep-rooted and solid investment in our people that has resulted in 1 million of our people being in education today.

As a sovereign nation, we will never welsh on the debt or the challenges that are before us.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):

I thank all colleagues for what was a constructive and worthwhile debate. Things back home in Ireland are evolving and there will be inevitable changes to our agenda. My colleague will make some announcements.

Mrs Joyce Watson AM:

On a point of order. I respectfully ask that people should be mindful of the language that they use in debates. The last speaker used the term “welshing” to mean “not honouring”. As a Welsh person in this room, I take extreme offence at that.

The Co-Chairman (The Lord Cope):

I do not think that that was a genuine point of order, but you have explained your position.

We are undoubtedly going to have to think hard about what we do about our agenda tomorrow. Because of the situation, we will move some of the items into this afternoon’s session. The steering committee will meet to consider that at 1.45 in the Joe Loss bar.

I remind Members that committee A is due to meet now in the Joe Loss bar, committee B is due to meet now in the Florrie Forde room and committee D is due to meet now in the Noble

suite. On top of all that, the group photograph will be taken at about 2.15 on the stairs in the hall by the fountain that you came past on the way in here.

The sitting was suspended at 12.44 pm.

The sitting was resumed at 2.30 pm

PROGRAMME OF BUSINESS

The Co-Chairman (The Lord Cope):

The first thing that I have to announce is that we have agreed to rearrange the programme. Because of events in Dublin, we have cancelled tomorrow's session of the Assembly. As a consequence, we will move some of the items of business to this afternoon, and some of the other items will be postponed until our meeting in County Cork in March. So when we come to item 8 on our agenda—the business reports from Committees—we will have reports from Committees A, B, C and D this afternoon.

After the item on the Irish community in Britain, we will take the rule change, which was No. 1 on the agenda for tomorrow. The change simply implements the decision that we made at the Assembly's last plenary session, by writing it into the rules. We have debated it already and passed the resolution, and this just follows that up. If there is time, we will also take item 7 on tomorrow's agenda—the Government replies to the reports, which are not the most significant replies that we have ever received, so I think that we may be able to dispose of them this afternoon.

As I say, we have postponed the other items until the meeting in Cork. Mr Niall Gibbons, the Chief Executive of Tourism Ireland, is not coming now. We have apologised to him and put him off to Cork. That is the change in the business this afternoon, so let us return to item 6 on our agenda.

ADDRESS BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

The Co-Chairman (The Lord Cope):

I am very pleased to welcome Owen Paterson, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, to our meeting. It is the first time that he has been, of course, as Secretary of State, but by no means the first time that he has been to the Assembly. He was most assiduous at coming to meetings of the Assembly when he was the shadow Secretary of State over several years, but he has made a first-class start, in my judgment, in his responsibilities as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, and he has a good deal on his plate, of course, as you all know very well, so the best thing is for me to invite him straightaway to address the Assembly, after which he has agreed to take some questions.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Rt Hon Owen Paterson MP):

Thank you very much, Co-Chairman, for that splendidly brief introduction. It is a great honour to be asked to address the British-Irish Parliamentary Association.

This is a first: I am probably the first Secretary of State to be appointed not facing some hideous political or security crisis. I very much pay tribute to the very difficult decisions taken over the past 20-odd years, started by John Major and carried on by Tony Blair and the Labour Government. I am delighted to see Paul Murphy here, as he was in the midst of some of the really difficult decisions, and I have the luxury of looking at the long-term problems of Northern Ireland and working with local Ministers, who I think are now settled into the current political institutions. Of course, we have seen through the last phase of devolution with policing in April—something that we strongly supported—and we look forward to working with local Ministers in a very constructive way.

Before I move on, I should obviously address the very major economic questions that have been faced in the past week. I had a discussion this morning with George Osborne, and I have had various discussions in the past week. We have been absolutely clear that the UK Government has a huge interest in seeing a prosperous, stable and successful Republic of

Ireland, with a sound banking system. You have probably heard other Ministers quoted, but it is a massive fact that the UK exports more to the Republic of Ireland than it does to China, India, Russia and Brazil combined. So it is hugely in the interests of the United Kingdom that, if asked, we should help in any way. I talked to George this morning, and I have just talked to Arlene Foster in Northern Ireland: the latest, as you know, is that the Republic has approached the EU and the IMF, and we will be part of that. We will also be part of a bilateral deal. I think that that is absolutely right; it is hugely in the interests of all parts of the UK. Last week, I was speaking to the Chamber of Commerce in Newry, and that really showed the very close relations that we have economically.

I should also like to say—we have discussed this—that we are strong supporters of nation states having the power to continue to set their rates of taxation. That obviously applies to corporation tax in the South, which has been a plank of the success in the South. Of the \$71 million that came into the whole of the British Isles in foreign direct investment last year, 35% went to the Republic of Ireland, and that was obviously very much due to the attractions of its corporation tax. I hope that, through these negotiations, that will be maintained.

On the economy in the North, we have been quite clear in opposition, through the election and since then that, when 77.6% of GDP, according to one report, is public spending and 30% of the work force work for the public sector, that is simply unsustainable long term. It would be irresponsible to do something too rapid or too precipitate, but it would be equally irresponsible to do nothing. We have set a target of turning the whole of Northern Ireland into an enterprise zone, and we are working on a Treasury paper, with local Ministers, that will look at various ways of helping to revive the private sector. There are some absolutely brilliant private businesses in Northern Ireland; there just are not enough of them. One of those ways would very much be to consider the option of whether the power to raise and, above all, lower corporation tax could be devolved to the Assembly and the Executive.

In the meantime, the UK faces its own very difficult financial position. The UK is currently borrowing £280,000 a minute. We will spend £43 billion on interest this year, which is completely dead money, and that will rise to £63 billion, despite the difficult measures that we have undertaken. Again, that £63 billion in three years' time will not buy a single nurse's wage,

policeman's wage, hospital or school. So we have taken some difficult measures. The United Kingdom as a whole has had to play its part. We had a lot of discussions behind the scenes, and the settlement for Northern Ireland is very fair. On revenue, 6.9% requires the Executive to save 1.72p in every pound of revenue over the next four years. I think that that is manageable. I went to four different Chamber of Commerce events last week, and businesses were telling me that some of them had to take out 20% in one year. On capital, which has been much discussed, we are absolutely confident that, despite one of the streams of capital being reduced by 37%, which was better than the 50% proposed by Labour in the election, we will make the £18 billion, which was part of the St Andrew's deal, as agreed by Gordon Brown between 2005 and 2017, but it will come from a different number of revenue streams.

We will work with the Executive. We had a CBI report that said you could save £1.1 billion if public services were run more efficiently in Northern Ireland, and I have not flinched from raising the issue of a shared future. According to Deloitte, even two years ago, there was £1.5 billion to be saved a year if work could be done to integrate more public services—obviously, education would be one. I do not underestimate how sensitive and contentious that is, but someone, sometime must make a start, and someone, sometime must raise that issue. So, with all that combined, we have a very positive view of Northern Ireland.

I see it very much as part of my role to help to work with local Ministers on bringing in foreign investment. We had two good visits to the States in October. I will not hide this—for three years, I have been banging on about corporation tax—if we could get corporation tax through, and there are strong arguments in the Treasury both ways, I think that it would put down a real marker that Northern Ireland is the place to come to do business and stick one's banner in the sand.

We are continuing to work on other issues. I saw Monica as we came in, so it is appropriate to touch on the issue of human rights, as I think that you will debate it shortly after this. The context is that the Government remains committed to maintaining human rights protections in Northern Ireland. We are quite clear about that. The previous Government's consultation on the next steps on a Bill of Rights revealed deep divisions and a lack of consensus on a way forward. There was a similar division in a debate in the Northern Ireland Assembly

earlier this year: Members split 46 for and 42 against a motion calling for a robust, enforceable Bill of Rights. So it is difficult for the Government to make further progress in the absence of a consensus on that among local politicians. It is very important to get that across, because a legislative consent motion must be passed by the Assembly in circumstances where the Government intends to bring forward any legislation at Westminster, such as a Bill of Rights, that will have a significant impact on devolved policy.

We know perfectly well that many Members of the Assembly clearly have reservations about a Bill of Rights, and it appears unlikely at the moment that any motion could be successfully passed. So building consensus is crucial, and I would ask all supporters of a Bill of Rights to focus their energies on engaging with those Members of the Assembly who are sceptical. The British Government is happy to move, but there is absolutely no point in moving until we have achieved some sort of consensus on this issue. At the moment, that is very much lacking locally.

I should definitely touch on another area: handling the past. We made it very clear on day one when we came to office that we wanted to publish the Saville report in good order and in a manner that generated a sensible and widespread debate. I should like to pay tribute to my officials in the Northern Ireland Office who worked extremely hard. Leading up to the publication of the Saville report, there were times when we were meeting twice a day, going over and over the various permutations of what could happen and what the reaction might be to certain results. I think that we issued 419 press passes on the day to those who were coming to Derry Guildhall. In fairness, the Prime Minister put in an absolutely splendid performance. It was very difficult for him and me to receive the report the afternoon before and just see how black and white it was, but I think that our reaction shows that we will not flinch from reports from the past. Where they show that the British state failed, we will face up to that and be prepared to apologise, as we did on Claudy and as we may have to do on other issues ahead.

One case in particular has come before you several times: that of Pat Finucane. I wrote to the Finucane family in June and had a meeting with Mrs Finucane and her son John, probably about two weeks ago now. I think that I was the first Secretary of State that she had met since 2006. Again showing that we will not flinch—this is obviously a very difficult case—our mind is

genuinely open. I set out in a written ministerial statement that we would ask for representations from the family to discuss how we take this forward, and that we did within about two days of meeting them.

On the rest, we are strong supporters of the work of the Historical Enquiries Team, which is working its way through 3,268 cases. Hugo Swire, my Minister of State, and I are going round talking to politicians in Northern Ireland, victims' groups and various others who have been involved in this field—academics, both within the United Kingdom and outside—and, bluntly, it is not easy. We all know how fraught this issue is, but we are determined, and again working with local politicians—it is very important that the UK Government cannot impose a “solution” on the past, because there is no such solution—we are genuinely looking to see whether we can find a way forward.

I should like to end on an issue that affects us all very much. Sadly, a small number of people will simply not accept the current settlement. There are a number of delusional, determined and dangerous people who are carrying on mindless acts of violence. I should like immediately to pay tribute to the extraordinary level of co-operation that now exists between the UK and the Republic of Ireland. I have regular meetings with David Ford and Matt Baggott—local Minister and Chief Constable—and they also have regular meetings with Dermot Ahern and Fachtna Murphy. We are working at a level that I do not think has ever happened before on operational matters. I go to see Michael Martin and other members of the Government. We are in very regular discussion, and we are achieving things. It is no good talking; it is action that counts. We have hit 199 arrests this year, against 126 last year.

Just to give you a feel for the level of co-operation—I quoted this in the Commons a couple of weeks ago—Matt Baggott, as you can imagine, is someone who believes in community policing had very good relations with his neighbouring Chief Constables when he was in Leicestershire, but he said that his relations with Fachtna are on a different level. That shows how closely they are working. It is only by working at that level that we will succeed. We have taken this issue to the highest level in the United Kingdom. It has been raised at the National Security Council, and on the basis of that, in our security strategy, we have raised the danger of terrorism from Northern Ireland to tier 1. We are absolutely determined to work very closely

with local politicians, particularly David Ford and the Chief Constable, to bear down on this problem. Obviously, we are working extremely closely with the relevant authorities in the Republic.

I repeat what I said in the Commons the other day: we have made a substantial settlement. We supported the settlement as outlined by Gordon Brown at the time of the devolution of policing, a key part of which was that, should the security position deteriorate, the local Minister and the Chief Constable had the right to come forward and present a case that they should draw down funds from the national reserve. That has been done already. Over £50 million went in this year, and the last tranche was £12.9 million, very shortly after we came to office. So we are absolutely clear that we will stand by Northern Ireland and we will do the right thing.

As I said in my opening comments, we now have the luxury of working with local Ministers on the real long-term problems, which I would see as mainly, obviously, economic and, downstream, social. We are quite determined that we will not let a small number of dangerous people divert us from our course.

I congratulate the Assembly on continuing all these years. I think that your contribution has been enormous. I do not think that we have seen relations between the Republic and the United Kingdom as close as this for a very long time, and the earnest of that is seen in the way that George Osborne has been taking a stand and offering to help on the economy.

I have given a very quick canter through the main points. I should be very happy to answer your questions. Thank you for inviting me.

The Co-Chairman (The Lord Cope):

We now come to the questions. I will put them in small groups. The first question is from Baroness Harris, and then Laurence Robertson and Alasdair Morgan have questions that seem to be on similar points. If those three will put their questions, the Secretary of State will respond.

Baroness Harris:

Thank you Co-Chairman. Secretary of State, notwithstanding the fact that policing and justice have been devolved to Northern Ireland, are you aware of the concerns of the Police Federation of England and Wales surrounding the use of police officers from the north of England to provide front-line policing cover on the streets of Northern Ireland, because of the alleged shortage of funding for the PSNI? Could you comment, please, on the rise in the number of PSNI officers, particularly those from the Roman Catholic community, who have to live in areas away from their communities, because of the serious threats to their safety?

Mr Laurence Robertson MP:

As you know, Owen, the Select Committee that I chair is looking into the corporation tax issue. I wonder whether you could perhaps give some indication of when you expect the Treasury to publish its consultation paper and when you think the consultation period might run until, please?

Mr Alasdair Morgan MSP:

Also on corporation tax, clearly being next to our jurisdiction, a low rate of corporation tax is a factor, I think, in Northern Ireland wanting to lower its rate. I think that the current Scottish Government would like to be able to set its own rate of corporation tax. If Northern Ireland got that ability, probably any Scottish Government might want that ability. It is not your Ministry, but you talked about what was going on and about the different views in the Treasury. Has the Treasury given any consideration to the spread of this policy to other devolved legislatures within the UK?

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland:

Lady Harris, the issue of whether to bring in mutual aid from other police forces really is operational, and it is one for the Chief Constable to decide. We have always maintained—pre-devolution and now, but particularly with devolution—that it is not for us to interfere, but I am fully aware of the doubts. I watched a senior Merseyside officer being shown how to use a water cannon in August, at the time of the parades, and he made it very clear that the PSNI

officers are extraordinarily skilled at coping with dangerous and difficult situations in which some of those whom they are opposing might be armed. He was absolutely dead right, because that evening there were reports of arms in the Ardoyne, and he made it quite clear that he had very real doubts about this. I think that the key thing is to ensure that the PSNI has the right numbers and the right funding, and we have made it quite clear that we will do the right thing by the PSNI. There has been an enormous reduction in numbers, and we will have to reconsider that in the light of the current threat.

On relocation, it is a very good point: a number of families have had to be rehoused. This is a constant worry for the Chief Constable, and it is something that we have discussed with him. The safety of his officers obviously has to be an absolute, top priority. There is no easy solution to it, except, basically, good practice and probably relearning some of the skills that were built up over the past 20 to 30 years.

On Laurence's question, I would hope to get the paper out by the end of the year at the latest. We said late autumn, and the details are being worked through. I am delighted that your Committee is taking this so seriously, and you have had some very good evidence sessions and a very good trip to Dublin, which was obviously bound to be helpful, given the spectacular impact that corporation tax has had in the Republic. But there is still time to make submissions, although the paper is being drafted as we speak.

On Alasdair's comments, I think that you will get some new jurisdiction on income tax, is that right? I think that 10p will be variable, for the Scottish Parliament to decide, so well done to you for having got that power. Do not forget that this is not a free lunch. The Azores judgment makes it quite clear that a democratic Assembly cannot arbitrarily carve out a beneficial rate for a small part of its territory. Portugal was told by the Commission that it had to devolve the power to the Azores Assembly, and the Azores Assembly could then raise or lower tax. We would have to do the same.

The other absolutely critical part of the Azores judgment is that there cannot be a countervailing subsidy. When Varney was put into bat to look at this issue—I think he was put into bat with instructions to put it in the bin—he came up with a bill of £310 million, and Gordon

Brown declared that we could not afford that spending commitment. Actually, the Azores judgment says that you could not make that spending commitment; you would have to knock off the forgone tax from the block grant. I have had people like KPMG look at this, and they estimate that the figure might be as low as £100 million to £150 million, because of reduced economic activity. That is one of the big issues that we are arguing with the Treasury about. For Scotland, it would be a much bigger chunk.

The Co-Chairman (The Lord Cope):

Thank you. Next, perhaps we could group Lord Dubs, followed by Barry McElduff and Charlie O'Connor, with your permission.

The Lord Dubs:

Thank you, Co-Chair, and thank you, Secretary of State, for what you have said. I want to ask you two questions. First, you referred to the Bill of Rights. Leaving aside those people who do not want a Bill of Rights at all, would you comment on the distinction between a Bill of Rights for the UK, with a Northern Ireland bit to it, and a separate Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland, as envisaged in the Good Friday and St Andrew's Agreements, given that there are people in Northern Ireland who are particularly keen to have a Bill of Rights appropriate to the circumstances there?

Secondly, after the success in terms of the outcome of the Saville inquiry—we endorsed very much the Prime Minister's comments and, indeed, your comments on the outcome of that inquiry—would you comment a little on the request by the Ballymurphy families for a limited inquiry, but some sort of inquiry, to indicate that those people who were shot were not terrorists? I think that your view is that the HET might do. I wonder whether you would accept that there are people, including in the HET itself, who do not think that it is geared up for that sort of investigation.

Mr Barry McElduff MLA:

Would the Secretary of State comment on the delay in 36 conflict-related inquest procedures? There has been a backlog of them for many years. What can be done to accelerate the inquest procedures into the 36 conflict-related deaths? Those procedures have not happened.

Mr Charlie O'Connor TD:

May I say how pleased I am to be on the Isle of Man, in a calm atmosphere and among so many friends, and only thinking of what is going on in Dublin? It is good that we try to be normal, and I am happy to do that. By the way, that is why I am sitting beside Baroness Harris, in Brian Hayes's seat.

Secretary of State, where do you see the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly going from here, bearing in mind that it has had a different kind of history over the past 20 years? A lot of positive things are happening on the island, and I wonder where you see the future of the Assembly. I do not know whether I or others will be involved, but I wish you all well.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland:

Alf, on the Bill of Rights, we went into the election with a clear commitment that there would be a UK Bill of Rights and a section on matters peculiar to Northern Ireland—the obvious ones that pop up were things like the right to a joint passport and the right to joint nationality—but we did not win the election, and we have come up with a new arrangement. Ken Clarke, the Justice Minister, is consulting on a new Bill, and he is, I think, aware that Northern Ireland is extremely complicated. I have said to him that we cannot at the moment put anything into a Bill until we have some sort of consensus from politicians in Northern Ireland. People who berate the UK Government are attacking the wrong group of people. It is down to local politicians to come up with an agreed text, which we could then put through as legislation, which we would be prepared to do.

On Ballymurphy, I met the Ballymurphy families probably about a month ago. I have met numerous groups, and as on so many of these occasions, their stories are absolutely terrible, but it is actually quite a good example: they are campaigning for an inquiry into 11 deaths in what was an incredibly violent and terrible moment in history. Over the three to four days that they were discussing, 28 people were killed across Northern Ireland. The problem that we have with focusing these inquiries on just one or two incidents is that that is really invidious on all those other families.

I cite the Billy Wright inquiry, which cost £30 million. I saw his father about a month or three weeks before we reported, and he was probably as unhappy, disappointed and, bluntly, unconvinced of the value of the report half an afterwards as he was beforehand. It cost £30 million, and it did not even find out how the guns were smuggled into what was then Europe's high security prison. That is £30 million for one death, against £34 million, which was the total budget for the whole HET. So we said in the election that we did not propose bring in any more costly and open-ended inquiries, and the Ballymurphy one is a good example of how incredibly fraught and difficult this issue is. If you did go for an inquiry on Ballymurphy, we would immediately get requests from the relatives of all the other 28 who were killed over those three to four days.

On Barry McElduff's question, inquests are entirely out of the UK Government's hands, but certain issues to do with the past are devolved, like the Police Ombudsman and inquests, which are in local hands. I am aware of the difficulty of some of these inquests dragging on and, apparently, some of these inquests being revived. That is one of the things that we are looking at, and, bluntly, we do not have a clear solution to this.

On Charlie O'Connor's question, I think that this sort of organisation is well worth carrying on. It is very helpful getting people together once every few months. I think that these events are thoroughly positive. If you think of today's circumstances and the events of the past week, particularly this morning, it is probably extremely valuable that everyone is here. Bluntly, I am in favour of any organisation that brings the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland closer and closer together, so that we really know what is going on.

I cannot stress enough that I was struck by how welcome I was as the shadow Secretary of State. I went to Dublin fairly regularly, every few months, and saw all the Ministers, the leaders of the Opposition and the Garda Commissioner. The fact that they gave me the time to do so was tremendous and really positive. The first week that we were in government, I dropped by and saw Dermot Ahern and had a cup of tea in his constituency, when I was on the way back from a private visit to Dublin. It was completely natural. We both knew pretty well what the other one was thinking. I think that that is how we should be working. So the more formal and informal get-togethers there are, the better.

The Co-Chairman (The Lord Cope):

I have only one more question, and it is from Jim Sheridan.

Mr Jim Sheridan MP:

Thank you. Secretary of State, you said, if I was correct in picking it up, that arrests have increased from 126 to 199 since the last election. Working on the assumption that they were not personal arrests by you, I am led to believe that there could have been some complacency among the police force in Northern Ireland prior to your election. Does that tie in with your Cabinet colleagues' view that there is no direct correlation between police numbers and the level of crime?

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland:

I think that that is a bit unfair. The outgoing Labour Government had begun to ramp up activity in the face of this new terrorist threat, and I think that it is a great tribute to the Garda that they have pulled off a large number of arrests south of the border, so there was absolutely no political point in this. I certainly do not want anything in Northern Ireland to become part of some sort of local football. I think that it is a very good thing that the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the local Ministers are working so closely with Ministers in Dublin and the Garda. That is the only way that we will help to sort out this difficult problem. We are all determined that they should succeed.

The Co-Chairman (The Lord Cope):

There are no further questions, but I have one further very important duty, which is to thank the Secretary of State very much both for his speech and for the very clear way in which he has responded to the questions. I think that he is extremely thoughtful in his approach to all these issues. I also think—as a matter of fact, he referred to his visits when he was shadow Secretary of State to this Assembly and to Dublin and so on—that he went to a great deal of trouble to prepare himself for the job, and unusually in politics, he actually got the job, too. That does not always occur. I was appointed as Minister of State for Northern Ireland at about 24 hours' notice, having done a quite different job before that, which was a bit sudden in the middle of

the troubles, but let us leave that be. He has given a great deal of thought to the job both beforehand and since. As you may have gathered even from this short session, he has also gone to a great deal of trouble to meet people concerned with all the various issues and the families of those involved in the heat of the troubles. I think that he is doing an extremely good job, and we are very grateful to him for coming this afternoon to speak and to answer questions. Thank you very much, Owen. *[Applause.]*

A BILL OF RIGHTS FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):

The next item of business is the motion tabled by Lord Smith of Clifton and eight other members of the plenary on a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland.

The Lord Smith:

Thank you, Co-Chair. I beg to move

That this Assembly, following the proposal for a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland contained in the Good Friday Agreement 1998, and further supporting the commitment to introduce Westminster legislation contained in the British and Irish Governments' Joint Declaration 2003, notes the delay in introducing a Bill to this effect and calls upon the British Government to fulfil this obligation.

Colleagues, I should like to thank those of you who have kindly supported the inclusion of this motion on the agenda and I thank Lord Dubs for assisting me in this. I have to say that such support does not necessarily signify agreement with the substance of the motion; it means only that the subject is of sufficient importance to be debated. I was disappointed, therefore, that the Conservative Party members of the Assembly were instructed not to support it as an agenda item. That is quite inappropriate. It is an attempt at censorship.

Mr Laurence Robertson MP:

No.

Mr Gavin Williamson MP:

Not true.

Mr Robert Walter MP:

Not true.

The Lord Smith:

I have been told that it is the case.

There can be no doubt that the issue of a Bill of Rights is an appropriate subject for the Assembly to debate. Frankly, it should have been raised long since. A Bill of Rights was integral to the Belfast Agreement, as later reconfirmed by the Dublin and Westminster Governments in 2003. Since then, there was procrastination on the part of the former Labour Administration to enact the necessary legislation. However, Labour remains committed to it. By contrast, Mr Owen Paterson seems to want to subsume Northern Ireland in the proposed UK Bill of Rights, as he has just said, so that Northern Ireland will be denied its own distinctive Bill. I am afraid that I was not convinced by what he said, especially in view of the memorial lecture for the late Lord Steinberg that he gave last week, which lends corroboration to the assertion that I am making. Even stronger and quite explicit evidence comes in a Commons answer to a question from Angela Eagle MP on 30 June this year. Mr Hugo Swire, the Minister of State at the Northern Ireland Office, said: "We remain committed to fulfilling the commitments in the Good Friday agreement, and we are considering the best way of doing that within the architecture of a UK-wide commission. We genuinely believe that if we are to have a UK-wide Bill of Rights, the people of Northern Ireland are best represented within that, rather than by any stand-alone sideshow." Note the language. I suggest that it is perilous to pick and choose parts of the Belfast Agreement. That could lead to an unravelling.

The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission was charged with the task of advising the Secretary of State on the issue of a Bill of Rights and submitted its advice in December 2008. It had consulted widely through a forum specifically set up for the purpose in 2006, which consisted of all the main political parties, as well as business, trade union, church and

community organisations. Furthermore, independent polling has recorded a cross-community majority of the Northern Ireland public in favour of a separate Bill of Rights. In answer to the question, “Do you believe that it is important for Northern Ireland to have a Bill of Rights?” 75 % responded affirmatively last February, a figure that rose to 81 % when the question was asked last July. It remains the policy of the Dublin Government, as expressed by the Minister, Micheál Martin, on 15 March this year. US Senators and Congressmen have recently written to David Cameron, urging the creation of a Northern Ireland Bill of Rights. The Scottish Human Rights Commission and the Equality and Human Rights Commission in London are also of this opinion.

On 3 November 2009—the Secretary of State alluded to this—a motion was proposed by Danny Kennedy MLA of the UUP which sought to urge the Secretary of State not to implement the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission’s advice. The attempt failed for lack of cross-community support, which is required in the Assembly. That is significant. The fact remains, however, that it is the responsibility of the UK Government alone to enact legislation for a separate Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. Failure to do so will give all the wrong signals and will only add to the security problems that are being experienced.

Co-Chair, I urge colleagues to support the motion and to affirm the full integrity of the Belfast Agreement.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):

Thank you, Lord Smith. Before I call colleagues, I should like to acknowledge the presence of Monica McWilliams from the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, who is here to observe this part of our deliberations. I call Jim Wells, to be followed by Gavin Williamson.

Mr Jim Wells MLA:

Mr Chairman, the Secretary of State summed it up succinctly when he said that at the moment there is no potential for cross-community support for a separate Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. The Assembly is split right down the middle on this issue and no mainland UK Government could push through legislation without consensus.

The problem that we face as a community is that Northern Ireland must be the most overregulated society in western Europe. We have commissions, commissioners and ombudsmen for just about everything and everyone. It is almost a stranglehold on policy formulation, business and commercial life. Many of us have grave concerns about the imposition of yet another series of rules and regulations. Remember that in Northern Ireland we have Section 75, which is unique to the Province. Under it, discrimination is outlawed on a whole range of grounds, be it sexual preference, gender, marital status or race. Frankly, we do not see at this time the need to impose the huge additional bureaucratic burden of a Bill of Rights in Northern Ireland.

The unionist community has made it clear that we are more than happy to accept a Northern Ireland chapter or section of a United Kingdom-wide Bill of Rights. We are an integral part of the United Kingdom. If it is decided that a Bill will cover the UK, we will accept either that we will be encompassed by it or that there will be a separate section that covers Northern Ireland.

However, we have not taken the pain—and it has been a desperate pain for some of us—of accepting certain parties in the devolved Government in order to hand power to the courts. This would be a litigants' charter. Every issue would be taken straight to the courts, no doubt under legal aid, to be tested against a Bill of Rights, with all the resultant bureaucracy and cost that that would involve. We are going through a difficult period in Northern Ireland. We will have our own opinions on the Secretary of State's comments on how fair or otherwise the settlement has been but, as we are trying to fight our way out of recession, the last thing that we need is to have the weight of further legal action on our shoulders. We have already seen, with all the Acts of Parliament that there have been, that people are very quick and keen to take matters to the courts.

Northern Ireland has come out of very difficult times. There is absolutely no doubt that there were perceived grievances in the past, but now there is a general view that everyone is having a fair crack of the whip. For instance, we no longer hear the phrase "the nationalist nightmare". That does not apply, because the nationalist community in many respects has as fair a crack of the whip as the unionist community. Fifteen years ago there may have been a

perception that a Bill of Rights was needed, but I think that we have moved on and, generally, fairness is evident throughout. The fact that 95 % of MLAs in Northern Ireland are represented in government and that we have a five-party mandatory coalition indicates to me that we are perhaps fair to the extreme. Therefore, I have to ask why, if the entire community is represented in government, there is necessarily a need for a Bill of Rights.

Let me explain the mechanism of Stormont. Nothing can get through the Northern Ireland Assembly under a petition of concern unless it has a majority of both unionists and nationalists. It is highly unlikely that in the foreseeable future a Bill of Rights exclusively for Northern Ireland as presently envisaged would get through. It is good to have this debate and we will not move to a division, as this body works by consensus, but I do not think, to be realistic, that there will be a Bill of Rights for a very long time.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):

Thank you. I call Gavin Williamson, to be followed by Noel Treacy.

Mr Gavin Williamson MP:

Thank you, Mr Co-Chairman. I will keep my remarks brief, as I am sure that plenty of people wish to speak, but I want to correct something that Lord Smith said. He claimed that Conservatives had been asked not to support a debate on this subject. That is utter rubbish. I do not know where he got that information, but I know that, as a Conservative member, I was not asked—perhaps it was determined that I was far more free-willed than all the other Conservative members.

It would be ridiculous not to consider this matter in the context of whether the United Kingdom should have a Bill of Rights. It would be like considering legislation in the Republic of Ireland that treated County Kerry totally separately. One cannot treat Northern Ireland totally in isolation. We have to look at the wider political aspects reflecting the whole of the United Kingdom.

Lord Smith touched on what the opinion polls had said. We all saw at the last general election how opinion polls can get things dreadfully wrong. That was amply shown with the Liberal Democrats. However, we have to build consensus in Northern Ireland involving all

parties. As has been said, at present there is no consensus on this issue, although I very much hope that there will be. However, that consensus must come from Northern Ireland, very much with the support of the British Government, as the Secretary of State said.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):

I call Noel Treacy, to be followed by Paul Murphy.

Mr Noel Treacy TD:

Thank you, Co-Chair. This is a pertinent and important issue to all the people in Ireland, north and south, but particularly to the people in Northern Ireland. The Good Friday Agreement was agreed by all the parties in Northern Ireland and by the two Governments. It is an internationally binding document. In it, there was a clear commitment that there would be a Bill of Rights in Northern Ireland and that two commissions would be established, north and south. The two commissions have been established. They are active and positive and they are made up with very good people.

Although I agree with a lot of what the previous speakers have said pertaining to Gallup polls and so on, across the island of Ireland the Good Friday Agreement was validated by about 81 % of the people, with a similar figure for the establishment of a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. This is not just about asking one question today and the same question tomorrow in a different way. This was a clearly focused question. On that basis, we know that there is a serious, yearning desire for fulfilment of the commitment for a Bill of Rights, which was confirmed again in the St Andrews Agreement—not to mention the clear indication in the 2003 joint declaration by the British and Irish Governments that there would be progress. I believe that it is imperative that we proceed with that.

I respect the Secretary of State. He has done tremendous work and we wish him well. As the Co-Chair said, he has worked hard on this issue. However, it is critically important that, in the context of the European Convention on Human Rights and the UN convention, we as sovereign states that are party to agreements fulfil those agreements in totality. We hope that we will see the Secretary of State make progress on that, so as to fulfil the desires of the vast majority of the people in Northern Ireland and give them something that they ultimately need.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):

I call Paul Murphy, to be followed by Alf Dubs.

Mr Paul Murphy MP:

Thank you. I welcome Owen Paterson to our deliberations. I much appreciate what he said.

I chaired the talks in Northern Ireland that led to the inclusion of the equality and human rights parts of the agreement. In so doing, I had to persuade people from both sides of the community to agree to a form of words, which eventually appeared in the document. That document, as Noel Treacy rightly said, was voted on by people north and south. The DUP was not a signatory to that agreement, of course, and I understand the point that Jim Wells made, although the later St Andrews Agreement incorporated the principle of the establishment of a Bill of Rights, which I support.

Over 13 years, things change. For example, we now have a commission. Monica McWilliams, who is here today, has done a great deal of work on these issues. Also, the Conservative Party has now agreed to a United Kingdom Bill of Rights—previously, the Labour Government were looking at the issue. When we dealt with this in 1997-98, there was no indication that there would be a UK Bill of Rights, so the agreement was made in a different situation.

Personally, I have no great hang-ups about having a Northern Ireland part of a UK Bill, so long as it incorporates exactly what would be in a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. However, I think that it is important—Owen Paterson touched on this—for there to be a good dialogue between the parties in Northern Ireland on this issue.

As was said this morning, everything is inevitably dominated at the moment by the economic situation, but I think that when Owen Paterson puts out a statement on this issue, as he is likely to do fairly soon, it should cover proper negotiation, consultation and dialogue between the parties in Northern Ireland to try to come to some sort of consensus. Nothing would have happened in Northern Ireland if we had not worked for and arrived at a consensus;

there would have been no Good Friday Agreement, which represents the most monumental consensus building of all time.

It behoves the Northern Ireland Office and parties in the Executive in the Assembly seriously to look at this issue very soon to see whether an agreement can be made on a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland, in whatever form. That is not easy, just as dealing with the past is not easy. However, consensus needs to be created in order to arrive at a solution. That is easier said than done, but we should not give up on it. It is important that we have debated this issue today and that the momentum continues, as it is an important part of what people voted on in 1998.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):

I call Alf Dubs, to be followed by David McClarty.

The Lord Dubs:

Thank you, Co-Chair. It is very good that the Secretary of State is still here to listen. He could have gone off after he had made his contribution, but it is much appreciated that he is here listening, even if some of the voices are critical of what he said. We would rather that he listened and did not just run away, as some others might have done. I thank him for that.

I am a member at Westminster of the Joint Committee on Human Rights, which has also done work on a Bill of Rights. We have worked closely with the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, whose work I pay tribute to. In sometimes difficult circumstances, it has persevered with what it was asked to do. Under the Good Friday Agreement, it was asked to develop a Bill of Rights.

I am not sure that the Secretary of State was quite right when he said that it is down to local people to come up with an agreed text, which we would then put through as legislation. That might politically be a nice thing to happen, but the problem is that there might never be agreement, which would mean that we were rather stuck. I see the difficulty. Of course we all want agreement, but it does not look as though agreement is on its way.

We in the United Kingdom have an obligation under the Good Friday Agreement and the St Andrews Agreement to proceed with a Northern Ireland Bill of Rights. I understand that one could have an annexe to a UK Bill of Rights to cover Northern Ireland, but I wonder whether, given what is in the Good Friday Agreement, it would be better politically for the Secretary of State to reconsider what he said and to have a Northern Ireland Bill of Rights. That would send an important signal.

The British Government have in the past, when they have had obligations, proceeded without necessarily seeking consensus—I think that it was in relation to the sexual orientation regulations in 2006. At any rate, I urge the Secretary of State to think again about this. In political terms, that would send an important signal to Northern Ireland and the rest of Ireland. Of course one would seek the agreement of the parties that are not so keen at the moment, but, to take up their point, I do not see that there would be any less bureaucracy—nobody wants bureaucracy—with a British Bill of Rights that had Northern Ireland as an attachment than with a separate Northern Ireland Bill of Rights. However, that could send a signal to the people of Northern Ireland that we were not going down the path of the Good Friday Agreement. I think that we should go down that path, so I still urge that we have a Northern Ireland Bill of Rights.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):

I call David McClarty, to be followed by Kris Hopkins.

Mr David McClarty MLA:

Thank you, Co-Chair. I fully agree with the points that Jim Wells put so eloquently. I will not repeat them, as I want to be as brief as possible. There is merit in examining the possibility of supplementary rights to reflect the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland, but I do not believe that it is viable for Northern Ireland to have an entirely different rights regime from the rest of the United Kingdom. I think that a UK-wide Bill of Rights with a section addressing the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland would be the most appropriate way in which to fulfil the mandate of the Belfast Agreement.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):

I call Kris Hopkins, to be followed by Lord Bew.

Mr Kris Hopkins MP:

Thank you. I reiterate the point made by Gavin Williamson. There has been no gagging of Conservative members. I have never been gagged and I would not be gagged. If I was being gagged, I would tell you. In fact, the case is completely to the contrary. Last Thursday we were invited to a gathering of members of all parties and the Northern Ireland commission to talk through this issue. We put our views and thoughts forward and had a constructive, meaningful and informative discussion with the group. In complete contrast to what has been suggested, open discussion has been promoted.

The Belfast Agreement was an iconic moment in British and Irish history. A key part of it was about a Bill of Rights. However, at that time, there was no discussion of a UK Bill of Rights. If it is good for you, it is good for us and it can be good for us all. It is important to incorporate issues that meet the sensitivities of individual nationalist and unionist groups. As Paul Murphy said, that comes only from consensus, mature debate and an understanding of each other's needs.

I ended a recent speech by talking about trying to get to some point of normality. If we constantly make exceptions for Northern Ireland, we will create more differences between us and we will not be brought together. We have to make the effort to mainstream political debate and discussion. As I said, I want a Bill of Rights for the United Kingdom and I will not vote for a Bill of Rights unless it protects the rights of the citizens whom I represent. That goes for the representatives in Northern Ireland, too. I want to make sure that they have a decent and meaningful Bill that protects their people as much as it protects mine. That will come only through having conversations such as the one that we are having today.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):

I call Lord Bew, to be followed by Lord Glentoran.

The Lord Bew:

I will be brief, Co-Chair. There are two issues that we have not discussed. Many speakers have stressed the importance of proceeding with the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement. I simply raise the question of whether it is precisely the case that a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland is an obligation under the Good Friday Agreement. There are obligations in this area, but a Bill of Rights does not seem, on my reading of the agreement, to be an obligation in the strong sense of the word. I entirely accept that it would be extremely worrying if we were moving away from, diluting or dropping something that was an obligation, but it seems to me that the wording does not quite bear out that this is an obligation.

There is also an issue about the content of any Bill of Rights. It is worth saying to those at this Assembly who are not aware of it that the debate in Northern Ireland has undergone a significant change in recent times. To put it simply, there would conceivably be more possibility of getting a consensus in the Assembly if the focus was on a narrower and less wide-ranging document. A number of people at the heart of the Human Rights Commission and its work—I am thinking in particular of Professor Brice Dickson and Professor Tom Hadden—have in recent years somewhat shifted their view towards the idea that a narrower and more practical approach might have more success than a more generalised form of human rights absolutism.

There are two issues, therefore. First, is a Bill of Rights an obligation as such under the agreement, in the strong and clear-cut sense of what we mean when we talk about an obligation under the agreement? The second issue is the content of what we now have before us as a possible Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):

I call Barry McElduff, to be followed by Laurence Robertson.

Mr Barry McElduff MLA:

The absence of Arthur Morgan TD means that I have to speak twice. Co-Chair, I want to endorse the interpretation—

The Lord Glentoran:

Co-Chair, did you not call me to follow Lord Bew?

The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):

Apologies, Lord Glentoran. I will call you next.

Mr Barry McElduff MLA:

I am happy to give way to Lord Glentoran, if you rule accordingly, Co-Chair.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):

No, carry on.

Mr Barry McElduff MLA:

Thank you. I endorse what Noel Treacy TD said about this being a commitment under the Good Friday Agreement. As I understand it, Noel Treacy chairs the Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement in the Houses of the Oireachtas. Failure to deliver is a breach of an internationally binding treaty. The British Government have said that they intend to look at the inclusion of a section covering the north in a proposed British Bill of Rights, but that would take many years and is not expected to include social and economic rights. From my party's perspective, that would not be acceptable.

The Bill of Rights for the north was to be particular to the circumstances of the conflict and as such was agreed by all parties to the Good Friday Agreement. The phrase "lack of political consensus" is being used time and again to deny and frustrate rights. Another example is the commitment to bring forward Irish language legislation. The European committee of experts has advised the Human Rights Commission in Belfast that not going forward on the basis of a lack of political consensus is not valid; it is not a valid legal basis on which to deny Irish language legislation. In Scotland, Wales and the rest of Ireland, there is legislation to protect and promote Scotch Gaelic, the Welsh language and the Irish language. The north of Ireland stands apart. The European committee of experts has ruled that the basis on which this is being frustrated—namely, the lack of political consensus—is not legal.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):

I call Lord Glentoran, to be followed by Laurence Robertson.

The Lord Glentoran:

Thank you, Co-Chair. During our many years in opposition, Lord Smith of Clifton and I had very few disagreements, but we had the odd one. When he asked me to support this motion, I said that I would not, because I did not like it. I said that I would try to persuade people to my way of thinking, as politicians do. That is as far as I went with it.

I strongly support the views expressed by Owen Paterson and Jim Wells on a Bill of Rights. In this day and age, when we are all very short of money—Northern Ireland as much as anywhere else—and we are trying to get rid of public bodies, quangos and a lot of the civil service, it is not a good idea to import a Bill of Rights and spend a huge amount of money on setting the whole thing up. Civil rights are an industry in their own right, which grows rapidly and becomes more and more expensive as various things happen. As Jim Wells said, people are in and out of courts. We do not need that in Northern Ireland at the moment—one day maybe, but certainly not now. The Northern Ireland Assembly clearly does not want it now. Its members are the people who are running the country for us, under the guidance of Owen Paterson, although he has a very light hand—that is all the power that he has. To bring in a Bill now would be totally inappropriate.

On the other hand, I know that the Government are going to redo a Bill of Rights for the United Kingdom, which will take into account the special needs of Northern Ireland. That seems to me to tie things up neatly. From where I sit—although perhaps not from where Owen Paterson sits—I hope, as an inhabitant of Northern Ireland, that the British Government will pay for our Bill of Rights.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):

I call Laurence Robertson, to be followed by Baroness Harris.

Mr Laurence Robertson MP:

Thank you. I confirm what Gavin Williamson and Kris Hopkins said. No one on the Conservative side asked me not to sign this or any motion. I was not asked to sign it or not to sign it. I would not have signed it anyway, because I do not believe in Bills of Rights.

In the UK, we have the Human Rights Act. The Secretary of State now has to make a statement on the front of all legislation saying that it is compatible with the Human Rights Act. However, I dealt with the Northern Ireland legislation. That Act says that Section 5 of the Human Rights Act does not apply. The situation is completely contradictory. I do not think that a Bill of Rights in itself is the important thing. I would like rights to be guaranteed in the relevant legislation.

I agree with Lord Bew. I reread this part of the Belfast Agreement about three times this morning and I do not think that it requires a separate Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. It requires the Government to guarantee the rights of the citizens of Northern Ireland. That can be done through legislation. The main requirement is anti-discrimination measures. If those anti-discrimination measures apply in Northern Ireland, they should also apply in Tewkesbury and in London. I do not see why there should be a difference. Let us put it the other way round. Suppose that Owen Paterson introduced a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland and that Great Britain said, "That looks pretty good. We'll adopt the exact same one for the United Kingdom." Where has that got us? What exactly is the difference?

I think that consensus in Northern Ireland is very important. Without a consensus, who will decide what should be in the Bill of Rights? What is left out could prove to be more divisive than creating a Bill of Rights in the first place. I attended the same meeting as Kris Hopkins and Paul Murphy in Westminster a couple of days ago. Two things concerned me. The first was what exactly would be in the Northern Ireland Bill of Rights that would not be in a UK Bill of Rights. The other was that we could start to reopen all the old battles that, to a large extent, have been settled in Northern Ireland. Regardless of whether people would prefer a united Ireland or whether they would prefer Northern Ireland to be in the United Kingdom, they are deserving of a place in government. The Assembly, through the Belfast Agreement, has already delivered power sharing. I understand the need to implement the Good Friday Agreement in full and think that we have gone an awfully long way towards doing that, but my concern is that the attempt

to create a separate Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland could start to undermine rather than to cement the progress that has been made.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):

I call Baroness Harris, to be followed by Jim O’Keeffe.

Baroness Harris:

Thank you, Co-Chair. Of course we want consensus, but we also want to meet our obligations. I am on Barry McElduff’s side on this. Talk of a Bill of Rights for the United Kingdom has been going on for a very long time, but we have not yet seen the proposals. I thank the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, ably led by Monica McWilliams, which has worked so hard for so long on a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. It is much further along than we are. The amount of work that it has put into this needs to be recognised.

Frankly, I am disappointed that money and the cost of formulating a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland have been brought forward as justification for not proceeding. I believe that, as a number of people have said, not proceeding would send out an important signal to communities in Northern Ireland that we are not bothered about their human rights and that we are not going to fulfil a promise that was made in the Belfast Agreement.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):

I call Jim O’Keeffe, to be followed by Alasdair McDonnell.

Mr Jim O’Keeffe TD:

In many ways, I find this discussion a little unreal. It is as if we were talking ab initio about introducing a separate Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. If that were the case, many of the points that have been made would be entirely relevant. However, as someone who has been a politician for many years, I find the discussion a bit unreal in the context of my interpretation and understanding of the Good Friday Agreement. I took it that a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland was a central plank of the Good Friday Agreement. The Bill of Rights was to be separate and specific to the present and historical context of Northern Ireland. That was always the basis on which I looked at the issue. The wording of the agreement—that this should “reflect the

principles of mutual respect for the identity and ethos of both communities and parity of esteem”—specifically related to the situation in Northern Ireland. One has to accept that it was part of the buy-in, particularly on the nationalist side, to the Good Friday Agreement.

I try to understand the points that have been raised, in particular by our friend Jim Wells, and the sensitivities in a situation where the Bill has not been enacted. The Secretary of State said that he was free of a lot of bother from the past, but this is one issue of which he is not totally free. It is a knotty issue to resolve. I see no easy solution at this stage. It is clear that there will have to be further discussion, but that discussion must be on the basis of what is in the agreement and not on what one would prefer not to be in the agreement. I would love consensus to emerge on a Bill of Rights, but it is clear that it is not present at the moment.

I do not think that it is appropriate for those who, as I see it, do not want the agreement to be implemented, with a separate Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland, to say, “We won’t join any consensus and so we have a veto on this.” That would not be acceptable. The general view in the Republic, certainly in my party, is that this is a provision of the agreement. We obviously want the agreement to be fully implemented. I encourage all those centrally involved, in particular the parties in Northern Ireland, to look at this issue in that fashion and to try to come to some agreement that would put the matter to bed on a fair and reasonable basis. I just cannot accept the view that, because the Bill might lead to court cases and might cost money, that is a basis for not honouring implementation of the agreement, just as I said this morning that the cost—the high cost, unfortunately—of Saville did not detract from the absolutely marvellous outcome that he achieved.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):

I call Alasdair McDonnell, to be followed by Rory O’Hanlon.

Dr Alasdair McDonnell MLA MP:

Thank you, Chair. A lot has already been said, but I want to reiterate some of it because I have been deeply immersed in this issue for some time. While I respect and understand those who take another point of view, I remind the Assembly that commitments were made in the Good

Friday Agreement. One can interpret and misinterpret them, but the commitments were made and understandings and trust were established around those commitments.

The commission that was established went to great lengths to do its job and produced a report, with which some people disagreed. However, to me the counter-argument to a Bill of Rights is more about stalling, blocking, obstructing and delaying than about producing an alternative. I have not heard seen any flesh being put on the bones of the alternative, which seems to involve some vague, mystical body out there that might come about in 100 years' time, if we wait around that long.

We need a Bill of Rights to benchmark what is fair and reasonable in Northern Ireland. The vast majority of the population feel that that would be a good thing. It is not just one side or the other. A lot of disadvantaged people on the margins feel that the system does not suit them and that they need some sort of benchmark of what they are entitled to.

I would be very happy, when we get a Bill of Rights in Northern Ireland, for that Bill to be extended to include the whole of Britain, but, as I say, an alternative UK Bill never appears and remains a mystical concept that may come about some day if we all live long enough. I do not think that it will ever see the light of day. The big thoughts and the wishful thinking are not and will not be enough. I want to see something happen. While I fully respect those who disagree with me, I just want them to put something on the table that we can put flesh on and at least discuss. We cannot even have a reasonable debate at the moment, because that alternative is not tangible. This issue needs to be progressed if trust and confidence are to be maintained. There will be a continuing demand for a Bill of Rights until such time as a better alternative comes along, but I do not see that happening in the short term.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):

I call Rory O'Hanlon.

Dr Rory O'Hanlon TD:

I support Lord Smith's motion, but I take the point that the Secretary of State made about how ideal it would be if you could get agreement between the parties in Northern Ireland. As I

understand it, this part of the Good Friday Agreement was written in specially because of the past history in Northern Ireland to ensure “mutual respect for the identity and ethos of both communities and parity of esteem”. As I see it, this is an obligation under the Good Friday Agreement. It is being called for by the Human Rights Commission, whose view I respect. I do not see a Bill as a threat to any particular group in Northern Ireland. I can understand Jim Wells’s point about bureaucracy—I think that we would all have the same view.

Mr Jim Wells MLA:

Does the honourable member accept that the fact that the Human Rights Commission is trying to enforce an Irish language Act on the unionist community hardly instils great confidence?

Dr Rory O’Hanlon TD:

I accept that some people might take that view. In all walks of life, nothing has ever been published by any group with which someone did not disagree. However, I feel that, because this is in the Good Friday Agreement and because it is important to 50 % of the people—I think that the vote in the Assembly was 46 to 40—it should go ahead. I do not think that the points about bureaucracy and the expense of implementation in difficult economic times are sufficient to hold it up.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):

Thank you, colleagues, for your good contributions. The debate has been honest and open and some new and pertinent points have been raised. I think that, in the main, the debate has been helpful and positive.

Secretary of State, we thank you for staying on to listen to the debate. You alluded to the Bill of Rights earlier but, as a number of issues have been raised, would you care to speak again?

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Rt Hon Owen Paterson MP):

Yes. Thank you to everyone who spoke. It was very helpful to be able to listen. My immediate response is to say that, although I have gone to Northern Ireland pretty well every week for three years, in those three years not one person has come to me with a complaint about

discrimination; no one has complained about getting a job, getting a post, an employment problem or getting a house. That is a really good sign, given the history of the past 40 years.

Dominic Grieve, as shadow Justice Minister, and I had many discussions with Monica McWilliams, who is sitting very patiently at the back, on our proposal to add a section to a UK Bill of Rights, which we thought would deliver what was required by the Belfast Agreement. I particularly welcome the comment from Paul Murphy that, as one of the architects of the agreement, he would be happy with that as a vehicle.

I stress in black and white that I am not a lawyer, but I think that it is worth putting on the record the text of the agreement. The agreement set up the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, which was invited “to consult and to advise on the scope for defining, in Westminster legislation, rights supplementary to those in the European Convention on Human Rights, to reflect the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland, drawing as appropriate on international instruments and experience. These additional rights to reflect the principles of mutual respect for the identity and ethos of both communities and parity of esteem, and—taken together with the ECHR—to constitute a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland.”

Dominic Grieve is a distinguished lawyer and QC and he and, at the time, Edward Garnier were quite clear that, if we could come up with a text that could be added to a UK Bill, that would satisfy that requirement of the agreement. We have not run away from that, but we have a basic problem, which stems from the agreement. The agreement has set up the institutions as they are constituted and, as Jim Wells said, that requires a cross-community vote. According to the Sewel convention, the UK Government cannot legislate without the consent of the Assembly.

To put it bluntly, this is not a UK Government problem. We have a vehicle. I talked to Ken Clarke about this last week. He has set up his commission, but we cannot progress until we have some sort of agreement in the Assembly. We have to face the fact that last time the vote was 40 against and 42 for. I suggest that all those who are enthusiastic proponents of this proposal work across the Assembly to see whether we can find a consensus there. We have the

vehicle, about which we are quite happy, but we cannot go forward until there is some form of agreed text. I think that that sums up our current position.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):

Thank you, Secretary of State. Again, thank you for staying to listen to our debate. Lord Smith, do you want to respond?

The Lord Smith:

Thank you, Co-Chair. I just want to thank colleagues for participating in this debate, which, as you and the Secretary of State said, has been very instructive. The issue is still unresolved, so I am sure that we will come back to it at subsequent meetings.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly, following the proposal for a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland contained in the Good Friday Agreement 1998, and further supporting the commitment to introduce Westminster legislation contained in the British and Irish Governments' Joint Declaration 2003, notes the delay in introducing a Bill to this effect and calls upon the British Government to fulfil this obligation.

BUSINESS REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES

The Co-Chairman (The Lord Cope):

I remind you that we will take all four committees today as we have suspended tomorrow's session. We will begin with Committee A.

Mr Jim O'Keeffe TD:

Committee A presented two reports to the last plenary. The committee has had some difficulty in mustering its troops because of the UK general election and not much business has been done in the meantime. We held preliminary discussions on the possibility of Committee A

examining the issue of commemorations throughout these islands, whether commemoration of the Great War, the 1916 rising or the Ulster covenant, and the possibility of coming up with some new approach which might lead to an inclusive approach to the idea of commemorations. This proposal is at an embryonic stage. In the light of current developments in Dublin I am unsure how far it will proceed in future, but it is a proposal on which Committee A expects to report at the next plenary in Cork if all goes well.

The Co-Chairman (Lord Cope):

We will move to Committee B and I call Robert Walter.

Mr Robert Walter MP:

We suffered from the British general election getting in the way as well. We have worked on concluding two reports. The first deals with British and Irish economic space and this has been completed. It would have been ready for debate tomorrow morning but that will now be deferred. The second report relates to EU migrant workers. We had also planned to debate this tomorrow but we believe we can do a little more work on it, especially with regard to getting up-to-date data to support the report, especially in the area of welfare benefit claimants. It will be ready for the Cork plenary as well.

We have produced a new proposal for a report which is relevant to the debate we have just held. It relates to the current situation on meeting obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights in the various jurisdictions. It will be interesting to examine the situation in the UK and Northern Ireland. Two different strands have emerged from the debate. We intend to examine the situation in the Republic of Ireland and the Isle of Man, Jersey and Guernsey as well.

Baroness Harris:

I draw everyone's attention to paragraph 19 of that report which contains our recommendation that BIPA and the Irish and the British Council should host a conference to explore the idea of a British and Irish regional economic space. This would involve the UK and Irish members of the Committee of the Regions, the European Commission and British and Irish Government etc.

The Co-Chairman (The Lord Cope):

Now we come to Committee C and I call Margaret Conlon.

Mrs Margaret Conlon TD:

At the last plenary we presented a report on apprenticeships. Like the other committees we have not held a meeting because of the elections on the other side of the water. However, we have proposed terms of reference for an inquiry into examining the support mechanisms available for small and medium sized enterprise, SME, sector. We will focus on SMEs active in the area of energy and green technologies and their place in the economy. We will examine the supports and the potential for the SME sector in the wider economy. Given the uncertainty that surrounds us I am unsure when we propose to begin taking evidence but whoever is here in future will consider that.

The Co-Chairman (The Lord Cope):

We will move to Committee D and I call Alf Dubs.

The Lord Dubs:

Item No. 9 will include the main substance of what we have been doing. As regards what we plan to do, we met at lunch time today and agreed the next topic for Committee D will be people trafficking. There is a good deal to discuss in this area. Although much depends on elections intervening, we believe it will be a major project.

Mrs Joyce Watson AM:

I am keen to see the outcome of trafficking report and I urge movement on it. The Olympic Games are fast approaching and it is a fact that there is a clear link between trafficking and major sporting events. I realise other things get in the way but, if it can, I urge the committee to move along with this report as quickly as possible such that it can bring something back which may influence some action which, according to previous evidence, might be necessary. It is pertinent for the British Irish Parliamentary Assembly to consider this matter because it affects all of these nations.

The Co-Chairman (The Lord Cope):

Lord Dubs was nodding during the latter part of your comments.

The Lord Dubs:

Naturally, we will do our best. We fully understand the urgency with the advent of the Olympic Games and the threat this poses in terms of increased trafficking. On the other hand, we must do a proper job of work and we must try to balance the two needs. However, we will not dither; we will get on with it.

The Lord Glentoran:

Having been closely associated with Tessa Jowell and those bringing the Olympics to London, we have taken seriously the problem of trafficking and losing athletes from overseas. I use the word “losing” rather loosely. LOCOG and the Olympic board have been involved and are well aware of the problem. If Alf Dubs and his committee go down that road they will get a good deal of information from the officials there.

Mr Chris Ruane MP:

My apologies for being late, I was attending a funeral this morning. It was an excellent report and much credit is due to the Chairman, Alf Dubs.

The Co-Chairman (The Lord Cope):

We have not reached that yet. I believe you are speaking about the next item.

Mr Chris Ruane MP:

Can I put my name down to speak after Lord Dubs?

The Co-Chairman (The Lord Cope):

Perhaps not everyone is aware that, with reference to the Olympics, Robin Glentoran has an Olympic gold medal. Admittedly it is from the winter Olympics rather than the summer Olympics but he speaks with authority on such matters.

THE IRISH COMMUNITY IN BRITAIN

The Lord Dubs:

I beg to move

That the Assembly takes note of the report of Committee D on the Irish Community in Britain, and the conclusions and recommendations of the Report, which should be forwarded to both Governments and devolved administrations for their observations [Doc. No. 174].

The history is that four years ago Committee D examined the issue of the Irish community in Britain. More recently, we took the view that given the changes in the economic situation this was something to reconsider and we updated the report. We managed to carry out a quick update between the general election and now. The exercise involved one full day of taking evidence in London. I am grateful to the members of the committee for coming to London and hearing a hefty day of evidence while we updated our report.

Before I go into the detail, I thank Ms Jenny McShannon and the Federation of Irish Societies for the help they have given us. My thanks to the Irish Embassy for its support and for hosting the evidence taking sessions. I am also grateful to the committee members and to Mr Nick Besly, the clerk, for moving very fast on this report.

Regarding the substance, please bear in mind this is based on one day of evidence taking and some written submissions. Were we able to spend longer we would have completed a more comprehensive job. Members will be aware that the Irish community in Britain varies in estimates from between 800,000, the figure from the last census, which decidedly understates

the position, to a better estimate of some 2.5 million. If we assess Irish origin even further the number is probably several million more than that. Therefore, it is a significant proportion of the British population and it is the largest ethnic minority in Britain, if I may put it in such terms. However, it is also invisible to some extent and people do not recognise its size or importance. This is also partly masked by the fact that some members of the Irish community are remarkably successful in Britain. They have a high profile and one has a sense that they are doing well. However, there is also a large number of members of the Irish community who are not doing so well, who are significantly disadvantaged, who are or older and suffering from the problems of old-age, including dementia and mental illness and other problems. It is possible that this group has a higher incidence of such illnesses than the population as a whole. There is an urgent need to support these people even though some of the Irish community have been remarkably successful and wealthy. The first point is the need for support for vulnerable Irish people in Britain.

The related point is the need to support the culture of the whole Irish community in Britain. The Irish Government has been very helpful in this regard and at the risk of tempting fate, in terms of funding, the Irish Government has been rather generous with regard to the money it gives the Irish community and support in Britain, partly funded through the Federation of Irish Societies.

Nevertheless, an important need exists and our concern is twofold. We are keen for local authorities and other bodies in Britain to continue to be supportive and for the Irish Government to continue to be supportive despite the present difficulties. We hope the needs of the Irish community in Britain will not be seen by any of the funders as an easy target for cuts.

I refer to the substance of the report. We believe too little is known about the needs of the Irish community, especially the elderly Irish and we recommend strongly that a survey of the situation of the elderly Irish population should be carried out because that would pinpoint much better than before the particular needs and the help and support for which they have a need and to which they are entitled.

We took evidence at one session of the Irish Cultural Centre, Hammersmith. Several Irish centres in Britain play an important part in meeting the cultural and social needs of local

communities. Unfortunately, with regard to the Irish Cultural Centre, Hammersmith there is a threat to its future because the local authority wishes to sell the building. If they can find the money, which amounts to some £2 million, there is a demand to preserve it. We believe this is a regrettable situation and we hope the council will reconsider because for all its energy and effort, I am unsure whether the Irish Cultural Centre, Hammersmith could find £2 million in the space of the coming 18 months. This is a serious problem. The closure of such an important centre would send a very important and negative signal throughout the Irish community.

There is a need not only for a further survey of the Irish elderly but for proper data on the whole Irish community to inform policy. Some three years ago, we recommended that the Office for National Statistics should continue to include Irish in the ethnic minority section. It will do this in the next census and we are pleased about it. However it is also important that there is a high level of participation by Irish people in Britain in this census to ensure the community does not understate its position. I have discussed the matter with people of Irish origin. When I ask them what they put in the census, they indicate they are British. I have suggested this would not do, although it is not for me to tell people to tell people how to fill in their census forms, but it understates the position of the whole Irish community. The Federation of Irish Societies will campaign hard to urge Irish people of all ages to ensure they engage with the census in a proper way.

Finally, there is the situation of the Irish Traveller community. This is almost a separate issue because they have particular educational, health and accommodation needs and a greater effort must be made to be aware of these needs and to provide support. Although Committee D is examining the issue of people trafficking, one of the six or seven issues or topics for the future is the issue of the Irish Traveller community. This is something we must decide on future; we have not made any decision about it.

I thank the committee members for the way in which they stepped to it quickly, the clerks, the Federation of Irish Societies and the Irish Embassy for all the help they have given us.

Mr Chris Ruane MP:

Alf Dubs has left one person out from those he thanked, namely, Alf himself. We had no sooner

recovered from the general election than he convened a meeting to examine issue of the Irish in Britain. My thanks to him and to Ms Jenny McShannon of the Federation of Irish Societies. This is a short but good report with some effective points, some of which Alf has outlined. I underscore some of these points including the issue of cuts that will come throughout the UK. We must ensure communities such as the Irish community do not suffer disproportionately. I believe a £2.5 million cut in the Irish Cultural Centre, Hammersmith in London is disproportionate and I urge members of all parties in all Houses to establish if anything can be done to rescue the centre. I thank the Irish Government for the funding it has provided, which amounts to approximately €7 million per year, some of which percolates down to my community, to the Welfare Benefits Shop and the North Wales Irish Society, which is doing great work. I urge politicians from the UK mainland who have Irish committees to establish if they qualify for this funding.

One way consider the situation is to take the view that funding has been given to the Irish community in the UK but the Irish community in the UK has given to Ireland in the 1940s, 50s, 60s, 70s, 80s and 90s in remittance and funding money home to help their relatives who were not so fortunate and who did not have employment.

Alf Dubs referred to the needs of the elderly Irish. My father died in 1974. He worked on the roads and suffered from bad health. He died at the age of 48. His contemporaries are now in the 70s and 80s, many of whom I know and who have bad health and specific needs, having worked hard, physical graft all their lives. Some of these people worked into their 60s and 70s. They have specific needs which must be examined by health authorities. Many health authorities do not recognise the Irish as a separate group.

Regarding the census, I am pleased the Irish tick-box will be included because it will help to plan for the future services of the Irish in Britain and it also serves as a historical record.

I want to give a plug. The report was drawn from a one-day inquiry into the Irish in Britain. Last Tuesday in the House of Commons, we set up an all-party group for the Irish in Britain. I urge all Members of the Lords and Commons who take an interest in Irish affairs to join the group. I am the Chairman, Lord Dubs is the treasurer and Simon Hughes, Liberal Democrat, and Peter Bottomley serve as vice chairs, both of whom were vice chairs recently. Paul Farrelly has

asked to be the secretary. We hope to lobby for Irish needs in the UK as a group, as individual MPs and as Lords in the Chambers. We have a good deal of work to do to help the Irish in the UK and in future there will be a new wave of Irish coming into the UK and we must keep a watching brief on that as well.

Mr Johnny Brady TD:

I wish to be associated with Chris Ruane in paying tribute to the committee Chairman, Alf Dubs, for the tremendous work he has done and effort he has put in, not only on this report but on all the reports of recent years. This body should be very thankful to Alf for his tremendous work and ability. He has pulled out all the stops on numerous occasions and he should be complimented. I thank the clerk of the committee, Nick Besly, who compiled the report in a very short time. We met in London on 11 October. That was a hectic day as was the previous night, during which we discussed many of the issues. The embassy staff must be complimented. Also, I thank Ms Jenny McShannon and the Irish communities for the time and effort they put into the meeting.

I was pleased to hear the compliments to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Micheál Martin, and the Irish Government for providing this money to the Irish communities. I am pleased they recognised that the Irish Government has given a little back to those people who left our lands many years ago, some of whom may never have seen home since. I will not delay the meeting further because I realise there is a good deal on the agenda. It is a good report and every member of the committee who that day should be complimented. The same crew go along to all the meetings, which is great.

Mr Brian Adam MSP:

It might be worthwhile to check whether Irish is included in the Scottish part of the census. I realise some of the process is devolved but I am unsure whether it is included because some significant changes were made to the census for 2011.

With regard to the Irish Travelling community, during the past summer there have been considerable strains between the settled and travelling communities in my neck of the woods in

Scotland. I encourage the committee to consider the implications for different approaches in different jurisdictions with regard to unauthorised encampments and the implications for changes throughout all jurisdictions. There appears to have been effects from the changes that took place recently in my neck of the woods. There is no doubt this presents many challenges.

The Lord Dubs:

I thank Mr Adam for his comments and for his contribution to the debate. We must examine the matter of the census in Scotland. I was unaware of the differences between the census in England, Wales and Scotland and I thank Mr Adam for the update.

When we set up the Irish in Britain all-party group in Westminster, which is getting on for 100 members already, we discovered that a large number of politicians in Westminster are of Irish origin. We carried out a little research and it turns out there is a significant bloc. If we could get them all to vote together we could win everything. The number of politicians of Irish origin is surprising, including those around this table and, in particular the two to the left of Mr Adam. They derive from all parties and I hope they will all contribute to the work of the group and use their influence.

The issue of Travellers is something for the future because we must concentrate on the issue of people trafficking. We can consider the possibility of the issue of Travellers in future. It is an important issue but people trafficking is also important and we can only do one project at a time, but I thank Mr Adam for the suggestion.

Although I have no wish to anticipate anything that takes place in Dublin I appreciate the Dáil may not be sitting for much longer before there is an election. In the past there have been useful debates of the committee reports in the parliaments and legislatures in the various jurisdictions. I urge members to get these reports on the agenda of their parliaments if possible because it helps to hold a debate. Those of us in Westminster will try to get these issues debated there. I realise those in the Dáil have been more meticulous or successful than us in getting these issues debated. The report will be sent to all the jurisdictions and we will receive the responses of the various governments to our suggestions.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):

Several references were made to the Dáil today. The Dáil has not been dissolved and members should not jump to too many conclusions yet. Despite what is going on, it has not been dissolved yet and I do not believe it will be dissolved so quickly. More pertinent issues remain to be dealt with.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Assembly takes note of the report of Committee D on the Irish Community in Britain, and the conclusions and recommendations of the Report, which should be forwarded to both Governments and devolved administrations for their observations [Doc. No. 174].

MEMBERSHIP OF THE ASSEMBLY

The Co-Chairman (The Lord Cope):

Now we come to the rule change. As I mentioned at the start of the session, this implements the resolution we passed at the previous plenary session. In some respects it might be more relevant now than it was then because we know that whatever may happen in my co-chair's jurisdiction, the assembly in Scotland will be dissolved just before we meet at the next plenary. However, if this resolution is passed that will not disqualify the MSPs present from attending the next plenary because the election will not take place until May and, therefore, no new MSPs will be elected in any case. This is an example of what the rule change is intended to do. It means that when there is an election or dissolution in one or other of the jurisdictions that we represent there is nevertheless continuity of this assembly and in particular continuity of each part of it. It is more significant when there is a general election in either the UK or the Dáil in Ireland but it also affects other administrations such as that in Scotland. The resolution holds that in future a member of the assembly remains a member until he or she is replaced by the new member appointed by the appropriate body or until the end of the plenary session following that election. This brings us into line with the Council of Europe and other bodies of that sort.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That Rule 1(d) be amended to read:

(d) The term of office of a member or of an Associate Member shall commence when his nomination has been certified to the Clerks, and shall expire on the certification of his discharge by the nominating institution or following a determination made in accordance with Rule 2(d) or when he ceases to be a Member of that institution, whether by dissolution or for any other reason:

Except that Members and Associates nominated to the Assembly shall, notwithstanding any dissolution of the nominating institution, remain Members and Associates of the Assembly until the end of the next Session or until new nominations have been made, whichever is the earlier.

GOVERNMENT REPLIES TO REPORTS

The Co-Chairman (The Lord Cope):

Doc. No. 176 is the response of the UK government to the Report from Committee D on Returning the Unemployed to Work.

The Lord Dubs:

I am unsure whether members received a copy. It represents the response of the UK Government and the Welsh Assembly to one of our earlier reports. It is a rather detailed document. Copies are available but it is rather long and members will be unable to read it all in a few minutes but I urge people to read it. Committee D will examine and assess it rather than take more time on it today.

The Co-Chairman (The Lord Cope):

Is that agreed?

The Co-Chairman (The Lord Cope):

Doc. No. 177 is the response of the Isle of Man Government to the resolutions. It indicates that the Isle of Man is not affected and I am getting an indication that the Isle of Man does not wish to make an intervention.

Resolved, That the Assembly takes note of the response of the Isle of Man government to the resolutions of the Assembly of the 40th plenary session (Doc. No 177)—**(The Co-Chair.)**

I will make some brief remarks before we adjourn. We are invited to a drinks reception at Government House hosted by His Excellency, the Lieutenant Governor. Coaches will depart the Sefton Hotel at 6.15 p.m. This information is in your booklet but you may wish to note it. We will depart from Government House in the coaches and return to the Villa Marina, where we are now, for dinner. The coaches depart at 8 p.m. and dinner will begin at 8.30 p.m. when we have arrived and settled.

There are no arrangements for tomorrow save to say that if you have not done so, you are requested to vacate your rooms by 11 a.m. unless you have made special arrangements with the hotel. In some cases guests will have left a good deal earlier. If you intend to take advantage of the extra time and go sightseeing in the Isle of Man, your luggage can be left with the concierge at the Hotel.

Mr Steve Rodan SHK:

If members are at a loose end tomorrow morning, by way of compensation there is a sitting of the House of Keys at 10.00 am. The House is a mere three minutes walk from the Sefton Hotel. Question Time takes up the first hour, followed by debates on various tranches of interesting legislation. There will be a second reading of the income tax Bill, a third reading of the sewerage Bill and the closing stage of a lengthy and controversial criminal justice amendment Bill. If members wish to come to the Public Gallery or the Distinguished Visitors Gallery, they are more than welcome. I will be in the Chair, so I do not have the morning off.

The Co-Chairman (The Lord Cope):

There is an invitation to visit the oldest continuous parliament in the world.

Motion made:

Resolved, That the Assembly do now adjourn. – **(The Co-Chair.)**

ADJOURNMENT

Mr Noel Treacy TD:

I pay tribute to Lord Cope and Niall Blaney, for steering, managing, leading us and ensuring we all had an enjoyable 41st plenary in the Isle of Man. I thank the Speaker of the House of Keys, Mr Steven Rodan, for the warmth of your welcome and for the lovely way we have been received by all of your citizens, including the staff here and in the hotel. We have enjoyed our time here and we are deeply grateful for it. I thank all our guest speakers, including the First Minister, the Honourable J.A. Brown, the President of the Nordic Council, Mr Helgi Hjörvar, and the Secretary of State, Mr. Owen Paterson MP, who have stimulated us with their addresses and contributions.

I thank everyone for their presence and contributions to what was a balanced, lively and, as the co-chairs have indicated, an open, honest and frank debate. These are the hallmarks of such meetings.

Despite the crisis and challenges we face, we are all in this business together. We have a collective responsibility to ensure we continue to go forward in a positive framework and to represent all our people in the interests of collective progress and success. I warmly thank our respective and collective officials from United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland and the Isle of Man, and those from our Embassy and the Anglo Irish Division of the Department of Foreign Affairs. I thank the speakers, staff and all the others who have worked the facilities here, including the stenographers and everyone else who have made this so successful. I thank everyone for their tremendous commitment.

The Co-Chairman (The Lord Cope):

As we have been told, we are all in it together, a phrase which reverberates occasionally around the House of Commons these days. I thank everyone for their attendance and we will see you all this evening at the functions.

Adjourned at 4.30 pm.