It is a pleasure for me to return the tremendous hospitality that greeted Hillary and me and our American delegation on our visit to Ireland last fall. It is difficult to imagine being better received anywhere in the world than I was on Dublin's Green. It was a day that I will never forget. And I hope that President Robinson and the Irish delegation will feel just as welcome here in America today.

Since its first appearance in the annals of world history, Ireland has been a light unto nations. When darkness shrouded Europe 1,500 years ago, the learning of the Irish pierced the gloom. And Irish wisdom has continued to illuminate Western thought throughout the ages, from St. Patrick to Swift to Yeats to Heaney.

In recent centuries, Ireland has sent the most brilliant gift of all to the world, the gift of its children. No nation has gained more than ours from the energy and determination these immigrants have carried with them when they departed Ireland's shores. Today, one of every six Americans claims Irish heritage. And even the awareness our Nation owes to the unwavering spirit of the Irish has brought to our country more than we can ever calculate.

President Robinson, you have spoken so eloquently about the extended Irish family abroad and of an Irishness that transcends territory. It gives us all great joy that today this Irish family is one.

In our time, Ireland's beacon shines as brightly as ever and, as in the beginning, it shines to the highest values of civilization. Ireland's devotion to building peace has made a small nation a great example for all the world. In its steadfast search for a just settlement in the North, Ireland has spared no effort and never faltered before taking a risk for peace.

The road to peace is almost never straight, and we've all felt the setbacks along the way. But just as Ireland has responded to the voices of hope in the North, so has America. Today I reaffirm my pledge to the people of Ireland: We will do all we can to help to realize the bright future of peace that is the birthright of every child of Ireland, North and South.

As they do at home, the Irish stand for peace in many distant lands. Every single day for almost four decades, Irish troops have been stationed abroad to preserve the peace in such places as the Congo and Somalia. At this moment they serve in nine different peacekeeping missions. And in Bosnia, members of the Irish Garda are training police so that that nation can rebuild itself and, by itself, maintain its peace growing now within the borders.

The United States and Ireland are bound by ties of kinship and friendship, commerce and culture. Above all, we share the bonds of belief, the determination to see peace take root and freedom prevail all around the world. Today we celebrate these ties. We resolve to strengthen them and to work together to see our common hopes realized and the lives of our citizens improved.

This is a happy day for America because in the hearts of so many Americans we have a special place for Ireland, and because we know that when we work with Ireland, we can make the world a better place.

President Robinson, welcome to the United States.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:28 a.m. at Summerall Field. In his remarks, he referred to President Robinson's husband, Nicholas Robinson.

Exchange With Reporters Prior to Discussions With President Robinson

June 13, 1996

President Clinton. Let me begin by saying how delighted I am to welcome President Robinson to the United States, along with the delegation from the Irish Government. The United States is very proud to have been a partner with Ireland in so many ways. We appreciate the work that they have done for peace in Northern Ireland and for peace around the world. And I look forward to this discussion today and our continued common efforts.

Northern Ireland Peace Process

Q. Mr. President, are you concerned about the rocky start the peace talks have gotten

off to and the kind of cool relationship or cool welcoming George Mitchell got there?

President Clinton. Well, it seems to be working itself out. And I believe that talks are going to go forward, and I'll do everything I can to support the process. And I hope very much that somehow the cease-fire can be reestablished so that everybody will participate, and there will be a successful resolution of it.

Colombian President Ernesto Samper

Q. Mr. President, what do you plan to do about the exoneration of Samper yesterday by the Colombian Legislature?

President Clinton. Well, the United States judges its relationships with Colombia on one standard, whether they're cooperating with us in the fight against narcotics. And we will judge our relationship with Colombia based on that standard. And we—however the—they have a democratically elected parliament; they have to vote on matters as they see fit. But we will judge our relationship with a country based on their level of cooperation with us in the fight against narcotics.

Church Burnings in the South

Q. Mr. President, another church fire this morning. Are you concerned that all the attention, including what you've brought to it, is causing copycats?

President Clinton. Well, it was getting quite a lot of attention before. We, after all, had had a huge number of them. All I can tell you is that the United States will never accept burning churches. It is wrong, and it's evil, and it has to stop. We have to continue to do whatever we can to stop it. And I may have more to say about it later today.

[*At this point, one group of reporters left the room, and another group entered.*]

Northern Ireland Peace Process

Q. Mrs. President, you said that you thought that some words of reconciliation would be helpful. Do you think that words of reconciliation from the White House would be helpful for the people of Ireland?

President Robinson. I think the whole approach of the United States has been very helpful, not just today or yesterday but for the last number of years. It has been a very evenhanded, nurturing approach. It has been both words and practical help. And it's, I think, evidenced by the presence of Senator Mitchell in the very sensitive negotiations at the moment.

There are so many different ways in which the United States is being truly helpful. And I have the opportunity during this state visit to express the appreciation of the people of Ireland. And I think it's timely to do that. I think this has been a very special friendship, reflecting the very long links between our two countries, but very, very thoughtful, very helpful, very nurturing, very evenhanded, very sensitive, and very patient. And it's not easy at the moment. Nobody believes it is. And so it needs that true friend who's with you during those times of difficulty. And that is how we view the United States.

Q. Mr. President, did you feel in any way sad at the way Senator Mitchell seemed to have been treated in the early days of the talks process?

President Clinton. Well, I don't think that Senator Mitchell feels sad about it. I think that we knew, all of us, from the beginning that these would be difficult talks and that there would be some rocky places in the road, especially in the beginning. We hope very much that the talks will proceed successfully now. Some of the procedural issues appear to have been resolved in a satisfactory manner to all parties. I also very much hope that the cease-fire can be reestablished so that everybody will be participating in the talks and they will actually produce what they were meant to produce. And we'll be further along the road to peace.

But I actually feel pretty good about the way things have happened so far. We're still going; it's still rocking along in the right direction.

Q. [*Inaudible*]—Mr. President, that the IRA might call another cease-fire?

President Clinton. Well, I have no inside information about that. All I can tell you is what I hope will happen. We need everybody involved to have a resolution of this that will, at the other end of it, involve everyone in a system that will lead to permanent peace and reconciliation and participation in the affairs of Northern Ireland.

Q. You said when you came to Ireland that you told the men of violence, ''Your day is done. Your day is over.'' Do you still feel that's the case after the Sinn Fein vote in the Northern Ireland elections? How would you interpret that vote?

President Clinton. I don't think it's a vote for violence. That's not the way I interpreted the vote at all. And I think the—I think every voice that represents a substantial element of the people of Northern Ireland needs to be heard in the talks. But if the purpose of the talks is to produce a lasting and enduring peace, you can't have the talks with a gun to your head.

Q. If you were talking directly to Gerry Adams today, what exactly would you say to him about restoration of the cease-fire?

President Clinton. Probably the same thing I've always said—say, first of all, congratulations on the vote, and secondly, I would say I hope that a cease-fire can be secured so that everyone can participate.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:19 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

The President's News Conference With President Robinson

June 13, 1996

President Clinton. Please be seated. Good afternoon.

Let me begin as I did this morning, by thanking President Robinson for the extraordinary hospitality that Hillary and I and our entire delegation received in Ireland late last year. I don't know whether it's possible to actually equal Irish hospitality, but we're determined to try. I hope that the President of Ireland feels very much at home and very much admired in America because she certainly is.

Once again, I thank President Robinson for the extraordinary contributions of Irish-Americans to our country, and for the extraordinary contributions of the Irish people not just to their neighbors, but to strangers in need all around the globe.

Over the past 40 years, every single day there has been an Irish citizen working for peace somewhere in the world. More than 40,000 military personnel have worked in U.N. peacekeeping operations. Great sums of money have been expended by a poor country for humanitarian relief. At this very moment, hundreds of Garda and defense forces are serving in nine different countries, from Lebanon and Cyprus to the Western Sahara and Bosnia. As Ireland has grown and progressed and become more prosperous, the generosity and vision of the Irish people have found a wider and wider range of avenues for their expression.

We are very grateful for the thousands of Irish volunteers who are working in places of crisis and suffering all over the world but especially in Rwanda, where President Robinson has shown special concern and special leadership.

President Robinson and I agreed that so many of the problems we face today—terrorism, international organized crime, drugs, environmental decay—have no respect for national borders, and to effectively meet them we have to work together. We discussed our determination especially to work closely with Ireland as it assumes the European presidency so that we can increase our cooperation in the international fight against drugs.

Let me also say I am encouraged at the beginning of the historic negotiations in Belfast toward a just and lasting peace in Northern Ireland. I know how much the people of Northern Ireland want peace. I saw it and felt it for myself last year. I know how hard the people of Ireland have worked to support the peace process in Northern Ireland and the Government of Ireland has worked to support the peace process in Northern Ireland. And I reaffirmed to President Robinson that the United States will continue to do everything we possibly can to help the negotiations along.

Madam President, we're glad to have you in America. We're grateful for you and your country. And the microphone is yours.

President Robinson. Thank you.

Well, I very much welcomed the opportunity to say in more detail to President Clinton how much the support of the United States and the thoughtful friendship that is