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Remarks to the Northern Ireland Assembly in Belfast, Northern Ireland

September 3, 1998

Thank you. Lord Mayor Alderdice, First Minister Trimble, Deputy First Minister Mallon, Mr. Prime Minister; to the members of the Northern Ireland Assembly, the citizens of Belfast and Northern Ireland, it is an honor for me to be back here with the First Lady, our delegation including two members of our Cabinet, distinguished Members of Congress, our Ambassador and Consul General, and, of course, the best investment we ever made in Northern Ireland, Senator Mitchell.

I want to begin very briefly by thanking Prime Minister Blair and echoing his comments about the thoughts and prayers we have with the passengers and families of the Swissair flight that crashed this morning near Nova Scotia, Canada. The flight was en route to Geneva from New York, and as I speak, Canadians are conducting an extensive search operation. We hope for the best, and we are deeply grieved that this has occurred.

I would like to also begin just by simply saying thank you to the leaders who have spoken before me, to David Trimble and Seamus Mallon; to the party leaders and the other members of the Assembly whom I met earlier today; to Tony Blair, and in his absence, to Prime Minister Ahern; and to their predecessors with whom I have worked, Prime Ministers Bruton and Reynolds and Major.

This has been a magic thing to see unfold, this developing will for peace among the people of Northern Ireland. Three years ago, when Hillary and I were here, I could see it in the eyes of the people in Belfast and Derry. We saw, as Seamus Mallon said, the morning light began to dawn after Ireland's long darkness on Good Friday with the leaders' commitment to solve your problems with words, not weapons. It lit the whole sky a month later when you voted so overwhelmingly for the peace agreement. Now this Assembly is the living embodiment of the promise of that covenant.

Together, people and leaders are moving Northern Ireland from the deep freeze of despair to the warm sunlight of peace. For 30 long years the Troubles took a terrible toll: Too many died; too many families grieved; every family was denied the quiet blessings of a normal life—in the constant fear that a simple trip to the store could be devastated by bombs and bullets; in the daily disruptions of roadblocks and searches; in the ominous presence of armed soldiers always on patrol; in neighborhoods demarcated by barbed wire, guarded gates, and 20-foot fences.

No wonder this question was painted on a Belfast wall: Is there life before death? Now at last, your answer is, yes.

From here on, the destiny of Northern Ireland is in the hands of its people and its representatives. From farming to finance, education to health care, this new Assembly has the opportunity and the obligation to forge the future. The new structures of cooperation you have approved can strengthen the quality of your ties to both London and Dublin, based on the benefits of interdependence, not the burdens of division or dominance. In peace you can find new prosperity, and I heard your leaders seeking it.

Since the 1994 cease-fire, the number of passengers coming to and from your international airport and ferryport has increased more than 15 percent. The number of hotel rooms under construction has doubled. And in the wake of the Good Friday Agreement, you are projected to receive record levels of investment, foreign and domestic, bringing new jobs, opportunity, and hope.

The United States has supported our quest for peace, starting with Irish-Americans, whose commitment to this cause is passionate, profound, and enduring. It has been one of the great privileges of my Presidency to work with the peacemakers: Protestant and Catholic leaders here in the North; Prime Minister Blair and Prime Minister Ahern. Our Congress, as you can see if you had visited with our delegation, has reached across its own partisan divide for the sake of peace in Northern Ireland. I hope some of it will infect their consciousness as they go back home. [*Laughter*]

They have voted extraordinary support for the International Fund for Ireland, the $100 million over the past 5 years. I am delighted

that there are both Republican and Democratic Members with me today, as well as Jim Lyons, my special adviser for economic initiatives in Northern Ireland, and Senator Mitchell, whom you welcomed so warmly and justly a few moments ago.

In the months and years ahead, America will continue to walk the road of renewal with you. We will help to train your Assembly members, support NGO's that are building civil societies from the grassroots, invest in our common future through education, promote cross-border and cross-community understanding, create with you microcredit facilities to help small businesses get off the ground, support the trade and investment that will benefit both our people.

I thank the Secretary of Education for being with us today, and the Secretary of Commerce who led a trade mission here in June, already showing results. Chancellor Brown takes the next important step with his mission to 10 American cities next month. As you work to change the face and future of Northern Ireland, you can count on America.

Of course, for all we can and will do, the future still is up to you. You have agreed to bury the violence of the past; now you have to build a peaceful and prosperous future. To the members of the Assembly, you owe it to your country to nurture the best in your people by showing them the best in yourselves. Difficult, sometimes wrenching decisions lie ahead, but they must be made. And because you have agreed to share responsibilities, whenever possible you must try to act in concert, not conflict; to overcome obstacles, not create them; to rise above petty disputes, not fuel them.

The Latin word for assembly, ''concilium,'' is the root of the word ''reconciliation.'' The spirit of reconciliation must be rooted in all you do.

There is another quality you will need, too. Our only Irish-Catholic President, John Kennedy, loved to quote a certain British Protestant Prime Minister. ''Courage,'' Winston Churchill said, ''is rightly esteemed as the first of all human qualities because it is the quality that guarantees all the others.''

Courage and reconciliation were the heart of your commitment to peace. Now, as you go forward, courage and reconciliation must drive this Assembly in very specific ways: to decommission the weapons of war that are obsolete in Northern Ireland at peace; to move forward with the formation of an executive council; to adapt your police force so that it earns the confidence, respect, and support of all the people; to end street justice, because defining crime, applying punishment, and enforcing the law must be left to the people's elected representatives, the courts, and the police; to pursue early release for prisoners whose organizations have truly abandoned violence and to help them find a productive, constructive place in society; to build a more just society where human rights are birthrights and where every citizen receives equal protection and equal treatment under the law. These must be the benchmarks of the new Northern Ireland.

I must say, the words and the actions of your leaders this week, and their willingness to meet are hopeful reflections of the spirit of courage and reconciliation that must embrace all the citizens. Also hopeful are the activities of the community leaders here today, the non-governmental organizations, those in business, law, and academia. And especially I salute the women who have been such a powerful force for peace. Hillary had a wonderful day yesterday at your Vital Voices conference. And as she said, we are pledged to follow up on the partnerships established there.

All your voices are vital. The example you set among your neighbors, the work you do in your communities, the standards you demand from your elected officials: All these will have a very, very large impact on your future. And to the people of Northern Ireland I say it is your will for peace, after all, that has brought your country to this moment of hope. Do not let it slip away. It will not come again in our lifetime. Give your leaders the support they need to make the hard, but necessary decisions. With apologies to Mr. Yeats, help them to prove that things can come together, that the center can hold.

You voted for a future different from the past. Now you must prove that the passion for reason and moderation can trump the power of extremes. There will be hard roads ahead. The terror in Omagh was not the last

bomb of the Troubles; it was the opening shot of a vicious attack on the peace. The question is not whether there will be more bombs and more attempts to undo with violence the verdict of the ballot box. There well may be. The question is not whether tempers will flare and debates will be divisive. They certainly will be. The question is: How will you react to it all—to the violence? How will you deal with your differences? Can the bad habits and brute forces of yesterday break your will for tomorrow's peace? That is the question.

In our so-called modern world, from Bosnia to the Middle East, from Rwanda to Kosovo, from the Indian subcontinent to the Aegean, people still hate each other over their differences of race, tribe, and religion, in a fruitless struggle to find meaning in life in who we are not, rather than asking God to help us become what we ought to be. From here on in Northern Ireland, you have said only one dividing line matters, the line between those who embrace peace and those who would destroy it, between those energized by hope and those paralyzed by hatred, between those who choose to build up and those who want to keep on tearing down.

So much more unites you than divides you: the values of faith and family, work and community, the same land and heritage, the same love of laughter and language. You aspire to the same things: to live in peace and security, to provide for your loved ones, to build a better life and pass on brighter possibilities to your children. These are not Catholic or Protestant dreams, these are human dreams, to be realized best together.

The American people, as the Lord Mayor noted, know from our own experience about bigotry and violence rooted in race and religion. Still today, we struggle with the challenge of building one nation out of our increasing diversity. But it is worth the effort. We know we are wiser, stronger, and happier when we stand on common ground. And we know you will be, too.

And so, members of the Assembly, citizens of Belfast, people of Northern Ireland, remember that in the early days of the American Republic, the Gaelic term for America was *Inis Fa'il,* Island of Destiny. Today, Americans see you as *Inis Fa'il,* and your destiny is peace. America is with you. The entire world is with you. May God be with you and give you strength for the good work ahead.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:40 p.m. in the main auditorium at Waterfront Hall. In his remarks, he referred to Lord Mayor David Alderdice of Belfast; First Minister David Trimble and Deputy First Minister Seamus Mallon of the Northern Ireland Assembly; Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom; Philip Lader, U.S. Ambassador to the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland; U.S. Consul General Ki Fort; former Senator George J. Mitchell, who chaired the multiparty peace talks in Northern Ireland; Prime Minister Bertie Ahern and former Prime Ministers John Bruton and Albert Reynolds of Ireland; former Prime Minister John Major of the United Kingdom; and U.K. Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown.

Remarks at a Groundbreaking Ceremony for Springvale Educational Village in Belfast

September 3, 1998

Thank you very much, Margaret. Margaret and Gerard said everything that needs to be said. I feel sort of like a fifth wheel now. They, just standing here and speaking as they did, embodied everything I would like to say to you and everything you would like to say to each other and everything your better selves calls on all of you to do. And I thank them for being here.

Thank you, Mr. Prime Minister, for your leadership in so many ways large and small. Hillary and I are delighted to be back in Northern Ireland and to be here with you and Cherie. And I thank all those who were responsible for the Vital Voices Conference at which Hillary spoke yesterday. I also would like to thank Secretary Mo Mowlam, who is one of the most remarkable people I ever met.

I thank others who have made this possible. Mo mentioned the First Lady. I also would like to thank Willie McCarter, the Chairman of the International Fund for Ireland; Lord Smith of Clifton, Vice Chancellor of the University; Professor Patrick Murphy, the Director of the Belfast Institute. I thank the members of the new Assembly with us