AUTHENTICATED
U.S. GOVERNMENT
INFORMATION
GPO

healthier environment, and a more competitive economy.

William J. Clinton

The White House,
November 18, 1999.

Remarks Prior to Discussions With Prime Minister Bertie Ahern of Ireland and an Exchange With Reporters in Istanbul

November 19, 1999

Northern Ireland Peace Process

President Clinton. Good morning. Let me say to all of you that I'm delighted to have this chance to meet with the Taoiseach and talk about the Irish peace process. I want to congratulate Prime Minister Ahern, Prime Minister Blair, and clearly, Senator Mitchell and the parties for the progress that has been made in the last few days. It's obvious that the parties have really worked hard to reaffirm their common commitment to the Good Friday accord, to hear each other's concerns and then to develop a step-by-step plan to actually consummate this peace agreement. So I'm very hopeful, and I want to thank you for what you've done.

Prime Minister Ahern. Ladies and gentlemen, I want to thank the President for his interest in Irish matters this last 7 years. For the last 5 years, we have developed the Northern Ireland peace process. I particularly want to thank him for giving one of his best and trusted colleagues to Ireland, Senator George Mitchell. He has almost spent 5 years with us in one forum or another, and we thank him for that.

We particularly thank him for this third round of discussions this year, 11 weeks of intensive dialog, of comprehensive discussions, which he has chaired throughout. And can I add, I think a great part of the trust and the confidence which we could not generate earlier this year was assisted by the fact that we could use the United States Embassy in London which, I think, created a new confidence for the parties, and we appreciated that. And it allowed the parties to get away from the ordinary, run-of-the-mill activities and to concentrate their minds. So that was a great help.

The reality is now, we're within a week or two of devolution of all the things that can bring the Good Friday agreement to reality. I just hope that all of the work that's been done by Senator Mitchell concluded yesterday successfully. I will now allow it to go forward.

And from the Irish Government's point of view, working in partnership with the British Government, with Tony Blair, working with the great assistance with the President, this is an opportunity which most people thought we'd never get. We have it now. It's for us to make it work. And I believe that the partnership government, working with the new institutions, the north-south bodies, it will allow us to go forward in peace and confidence and prosperity, and we appreciate that opportunity, President.

Decommissioning of Weapons

Q. Mr. President, the IRA statement yesterday made no mention of an actual turnover of weapons. Can there be a real peace until that happens?

President Clinton. Well, that is required by the Good Friday accord, and I think the fact that they have committed themselves to a process involving General de Chastelain and the decommissioning body indicates where this is going.

My sense is—and maybe Prime Minister Ahern would like to comment, he knows more than I do—but my sense is that both sides know what the other is going to say and do along this road and that this is the next step. And I thought it was an encouraging statement. It's certainly the most forthcoming the IRA has been as opposed to Sinn Fein, and so I think that we're moving in the right direction.

Prime Minister Ahern. What the President says is absolutely correct, and I think the IRA statement has to be read in conjunction with the Sinn Fein statement of the previous day. And the key aspect that people should remember is that last July, when Tony Blair and I tried to bring this to this stage of completion and did not succeed, it was the actions of an IRA statement. And the IRA, at that stage, had not agreed to put

somebody working directly as an interlocutor with General de Chastelain. That has now been achieved.

Ulster Unionists

Q. Mr. President, Mr. Trimble of the Ulster Unionist Party still has to convince his party that this agreement with Senator Mitchell is worth going ahead with. Do you have any message for the Ulster Unionists?

President Clinton. Well, I think David Trimble has provided very strong and clear leadership. I don't think that he would be doing this if he didn't believe that ultimately all the provisions of the Good Friday accord would be honored. And I hope his party will stay with him, because he has been absolutely pivotal to this. And it's taken a lot of courage for him to take some of the decisions that he's taken, but because of that, we're on the verge of successful peace. And as I said, I am absolutely confident that he would not have agreed to any of this if he didn't think the whole Good Friday accord would be honored. And so I hope that he will receive the support of his party membership. I think they should stick with them, and I hope they will.

Press Secretary Joe Lockhart. Thank you very much.

President's Visit to Greece

Q. Mr. President, what do you think of the Greek Government's decision to ban protests during your visit to Athens?

President Clinton. I don't know that that's exactly the decision they made, so I can't comment until I'm absolutely sure that's what they did. I thought what they were trying to do is to do what a lot of countries do, which is to maintain some sort of distance between the protests and the subject of the protests. I don't believe they have banned them all.

Q. There seem to be some protests brewing there for your arrival, sir. What's your reaction to that, and——

President Clinton. First of all, I'm delighted to be going, and I'm not concerned about the protests. Greece and the United States have been great allies. They're very important to us. The Greek-American community is a very important part of our country, and the country has made absolutely astonishing progress over the last 10 years. And I would hope that this would be an opportunity for us to talk about what we have in common and where we're going.

I also think that the Greek people and the Government should be quite encouraged by this new Cyprus initiative and by the fact that I found a receptive ear here on three separate occasions when I spoke in Turkey about the necessity of the Turkish people and the Greeks being reconciled. So I know that a lot of people in Greece disagree with my position on Kosovo, and they have a right to their opinion, and I have a right to mine. I believe I was right, and I think that the facts have proved that I was right. But I don't mind. Greece is the world's oldest democracy. If people want to protest, they ought to have a chance to do it.

Situation in Chechnya

Q. Mr. President, do you think President Yeltsin might be changing course now on Chechnya by allowing an OSCE official to go and follow the political process?

President Clinton. Well, I think it's encouraging that the OSCE Chairman-in-Office has been invited there. I also think it's encouraging that this charter signing, which we're going to have in here in a few minutes, will be joined by Russia, because the charter specifically says that we do have to be concerned about internal affairs in other countries. So this is a significant move by Russia, and so these two things are encouraging.

Obviously, we've got a lot of turns in the road on Chechnya before it's resolved, but I would say that, compared to how things were when we all got here, those are two things that are hopeful.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:47 a.m. at Ciragan Palace. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom; George J. Mitchell, Special Assistant to the President for Northern Ireland; Gen. John de Castelain, Canadian Defense Forces (Ret.), chair, Independent International Commission on Decommissioning; Ulster Unionist Party Leader David Trimble; President Boris Yeltsin of Russia; and Foreign Minister Knut Velleback of Norway, Chairman-in-Office, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. A tape was not

available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Proclamation 7253—National Family Week, 1999

November 19, 1999

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

Families are the foundation of our individual lives and the life of our Nation. We turn to our families for the nurturing, guidance, and unconditional love that sustain us; from them we learn the values and convictions that sustain our society.

I am proud of my Administration's commitment to providing families with the resources they need to flourish. We have strengthened family incomes through the Child Tax Credit and by increasing the minimum wage and expanding the Earned Income Tax Credit, and today the yearly income of a typical American family is higher than it has ever been in our Nation's history. We have opened the doors of higher education by making student loans less expensive and easier to repay and by providing new tax credits and larger Pell Grant scholarships. We are also working to ensure that parents have access to quality and affordable child care for their children. These and other family-friendly policies, such as the Family and Medical Leave Act I signed into law in 1993, have helped parents to balance the demands of work and family and have brought increased financial security, expanded opportunity, and renewed hope for the future to families across America.

As we look to that future, we must not forget our rich history. We are fast approaching the dawn of a new millennium, and my Administration is marking this historic milestone with family-oriented programs that honor the past and imagine the future. Through ''My History is America's History,'' a project sponsored by the White House Millennium Council and the National Endowment for the Humanities, we are encouraging our Nation's families to rediscover America's history by recording and preserving their own stories and passing them on to the next generation. Through remembered conversations, restored photographs, treasured letters, diaries, or other keepsakes, each family can recognize and preserve its part in America's rich and complex story and give a priceless gift to the future.

As we gather in our homes once again at this time of thanksgiving, let us recognize that the family members who surround us are among the most precious blessings in our lives, and let us pledge to keep their stories alive for the benefit of generations to come.

Now, Therefore, I, William J. Clinton, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim November 21 through November 27, 1999, as National Family Week. I call upon Federal, State, and local officials to honor American families with appropriate programs and activities, and I urge all the people of the United States to reaffirm their family ties and to share their family histories.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this nineteenth day of November, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and ninety-nine, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twenty-fourth.

William J. Clinton

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 8:45 a.m., November 22, 1999]

NOTE: This proclamation will be published in the *Federal Register* on November 23.

Proclamation 7254—National Family Caregivers Week, 1999

November 19, 1999

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

During this season when we give thanks for the many blessings in our lives, let us take time to acknowledge the loving support of the millions of family caregivers across our country who provide for the needs of parents, spouses, and other loved ones who are no