



PRIME MINISTER

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING, MP AND
THE PRIME MINISTER OF IRELAND, MR ALBERT REYNOLDS, TD
PARLIAMENT HOUSE, CANBERRA
TUESDAY 20 SEPTEMBER, 1994**

PM: Let me begin by saying what a pleasure it is to have the Taoiseach with me in Australia and to be able to repay some of that exceptionally generous hospitality he extended to me just a year ago, almost to the day. We've had a very useful discussion about our bilateral relationships, about development in Europe and the Asia-Pacific area and I also had the benefit of the Taoiseach's view on the peace process in Ireland, in Northern Ireland, and I thought I would just take this opportunity of saying that a very large measure of the congratulations for this development go to his very courageous role and the risks that he has taken to promote peace within the island of Ireland and Northern Ireland. I think I can discern from his remarks his appreciation of the positive role that John Major and the British government played, and I think that all Australians hoped that there will be a genuine and lasting peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland and this is a matter of great interest in Australia as such a large proportion of the nation has Irish ancestry. I told the Taoiseach that Australia will offer assistance wherever it can - you might recall Sir Ninian Stephen's role in the process, earlier process, in 1992 - and naturally our moral support for the process which the Taoiseach has undertaken.

So, on our bilateral relationship could I say that it is continuing to improve, we are seeing more investment in Australia from Ireland and vice versa. We're both in very advantageous positions, Australia relative to the Asia-Pacific, Ireland relative to Europe, and we are attracting investment and doing things because of those two factors. So, for me this is a matter of great personal joy to have the Taoiseach and his wife in Australia and, I think, the Australian people will get a chance to see him and talk with him, and to renew this friendship and acquaintance which the people of Australia have with the people of Ireland. It is a very timely visit and I am sure that, as a consequence, Australians will get to know Ireland better and, most particularly, at this important time, in this very significant moment in history in which the

Taoiseach has been so critically involved, himself. So, I would just invite him to make some introductory comments, should he wish to and then I am sure we'll both take questions.

T: Thank you very much, Prime Minister. I certainly have enjoyed my visit to Australia, in the first few days I have been here. There is a traditional warmth and, as an Irish Prime Minister coming here, I feel like I am coming home because that is the type of warmth and welcome, indeed, that has been extended to me - and, indeed, here today by your own Prime Minister.

It is just a year ago, as he said, and it seems a very short year but a very momentous year as far as events in Ireland are concerned, in that both the Irish and the British governments have been involved in negotiations to try and bring peace to the island of Ireland after 25 years of non stop violence and armed conflict. It is a centuries old problem in Ireland that we are trying to address and, first of all we had the success of the Downing Street Declaration which addressed all of the concerns of both communities, which, indeed, looked at the uncertainties for the future, as both communities saw it; which set out a set of principles on which a future agreement could be constructed; and, indeed, it has received overwhelming support from the Irish people, North and South, and, indeed, has been tremendously well supported by governments throughout the world as well.

We, of course, because of our historic links here - going back to the early days of settlers, indeed, people who came here not voluntarily and some of them who tried to get away in a hurry out of here, I am not one of those. But, I think that it is important that we're here, to explain to the Australian people who have a deep and abiding interest, indeed, in seeing peace return to Ireland after centuries of conflict and I believe we're well on the way to do that. We had, of course, a momentous decision by the IRA to stop violence for good and we're now entering the third week and despite provocation it has not broken down and it will not break down and it will be there. And I think we can build on that position and hopefully as the others who are involved in armed conflict in the other community will see the way to join the peace process and make a reciprocal decision on their part.

So, I am delighted to be here, indeed, with Prime Minister Keating, I know that he enjoyed going to Ireland to seek out his roots as, indeed, so many Australians do, we have seen a development on the economic front, between Australian companies coming to Ireland and Irish companies coming to Australia. Because, we're both part of areas of the world where trade is expanding, where economies are expanding, and, indeed, the Australian economy is now growing as the Irish economy is growing. And, there is a lot more to be gained by bilateral cooperation, by economic cooperation and both of us, indeed are strongly of the view that as world trade expands the market is a global market. We indeed, manage an economy that has to export 70 per cent

of what we produce to make our way in the world. It is a very successful economy in Ireland, at the moment one of the most successful in the OECD, with a growth rate of about five and a half per cent, a low inflation rate of between two and two and a half per cent, very strong balance of payments and balance of trade situations - all building a good situation to expand as Europe, indeed, begins to come out of recession. And, of course, down here in this part of the world it is the same where world trade is growing, where the Pacific rim, indeed, is very strong economically. The development of trade always, at the end of the day, comes back to provide a better quality of life and a better standard of living for people and I think that is what both of us are in politics for. Thank you.

J: Mr Reynolds, could I ask you...today we've heard Gerry Adams and Sinn Fein reject the notion of a referendum as put by John Major saying it's premature and inappropriate - do you have any reaction to that at the moment?

AR: Well, it's implicit in the Downing Street Declaration that when and if we get an agreement, you know, a broadly structured agreement in a balanced constitutional manner, I have always said on behalf of the Irish Government that we would put to the Irish people in a referendum possible changes in the Irish Constitution - that it would make its own contribution to a just and lasting settlement to the problem in Ireland, and that the British Government indeed have intimated on a number of occasions that they would be holding a referendum in Northern Ireland concurrently with the one in the South. So, what both Governments want to do is to transfer the decision making process for the future of Ireland to the people of Ireland North and South, and take away the Governments from getting involved. As you know, the Government of Ireland Act of 1920, section 75, is really the Constitutional basis on which partition was imposed in Ireland. That's their constitutional basis - our constitutional basis is Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution. We have said that in a balanced constitution and overall settlement, we would be putting the case to the Irish people, and they would be doing the same. That's the way forward and at the end of the day, the people will be the deciders, and not politicians and not governments.

J: Prime Minister, you spoke about offering help to the peace process whatever help you can give - did you discuss with the Taoiseach the possibility of giving financial aid to Northern Ireland?

PK: I did, and I'll be saying something further about that tonight.

J: Mr Reynolds, did you ask the Prime Minister about the question of Visas to Sinn Fein people coming to Australia?

AR: I explained to the prime minister in relation to our overall discussion on the peace process and how it's developing, and in relation to possible applications - I understand he doesn't have any applications for Visas

from any members of Sinn Fein at the moment - that the position of the Irish Government was that we now treat Sinn Fein as a fully constitutional party. I have personally met Gerry Adams, I have personally involved them in the negotiation process because one of my obligations under the Downing Street Declaration is to set up a forum for peace and reconciliation in Ireland. Recognising that you must first of all reconcile the people that have been driven apart by the last 25 years of Irish conflict. That you must get people to unite in mind and in soul and in heart before you can talk about territorial reunification, and I believe that is the way forward. And to do that I am setting up - hopefully by the end of October - a forum for peace and reconciliation in which all parties are invited to participate, and that includes Sinn Fein because I have made it clear all along that if Sinn Fein, IRA and the Republican Movement were to make a decision to leave behind violence for good - which they have done - I was prepared to make way for them and find a place for them in the political process. I have done that, and they're now a constitutional party in so far as the Irish Government is concerned. But at the end of the day, if they make applications to come to Australia, it would be a matter for the Australian Government to make their own decisions in that regard.

J: Mr Keating, what would be Australia's response?

PK: Well, as the Prime Minister said - we have not had applications at this point but, obviously, we will take account of the changed climate in Ireland - the ambience there. Our interest always was the likelihood of some sort of discord here in the past in the event that the ambience has changed, and changed to the point the Taoiseach has made clear that he regards Sinn Fein as a constitutional party - the mere fact of him saying that makes a difference, I think, to the attitude we would take were an application by a representatives of Sinn Fein to be received by us.

J: Would you go as far, Mr Keating, to say that we could draw from that the inference that in principle representatives of Sinn Fein are now welcome?

PK: No. Well, we'll see what happens if we get an application - at this point we haven't got any.

J: Mr Keating, the ALP National Conference is expected to consider the question of British troops being withdrawn from Northern Ireland - do you believe they should be?

PK: Well, I think the Taoiseach has made very clear to you today that this is a matter that should be left to the people of the island of Ireland. That the matter shouldn't be resolved, in a sense, by the politicians in parliaments as has sought to be done now for so long, unsuccessfully. And that if that sovereignty is restored and returned to the people - where decisions can be made by referendum in Ireland or by change to

an Act of Parliament in Britain, and referendum in Northern Ireland - then those events can pave the way to a settlement here. The important thing, I think, is that life returns to as near as normal in this environment, and that would, I think, tell me that troops would be better withdrawn as this position of trust improves, and where - I think, particularly the British Government - take the view that this is a durable cease-fire.

AR: I think to add to that - the reason the British Army are there is to support the security forces, and it's because of the conflict over the last 25 years between the 2 communities, and between para-militaries on both sides. So if you get a situation where a definitive decision has been made on behalf of the IRA to cease violence - and hopefully that decision will emanate from Loyalist para-militaries in due course - then the need for the British Army in the large numbers that they are present on the streets of Northern Ireland will be no longer required. And I have no doubt that the British Government will be only too delighted to withdraw troops back out of Northern Ireland as soon as the security threat as they see it de-escalates. And it has been de-escalating over the last couple of weeks, and as days and weeks go by, I have no doubt that they will be assured that there is less and less need for British Army on the streets, and possibly the first step in that would be when they feel that the security threat is gone from para-militaries on both sides, that they would withdraw the troops to barracks as a first step, and after that it is a matter for them to withdraw them in the numbers as they see the threat de-escalate.

J: Prime Minister Reynolds, could I just direct your mind to the APEC issues for a minute. There's been a lot of concern among the European community about the way APEC might go and develop. In your talks today have you been reassured about the way APEC is likely to evolve in terms of European relations with Australia?

AR: Yes, we have had a good discussion on APEC and how the Prime Minister and the other members see it developing, and what both of us want to see is that whatever groups - whether it's APEC and the European Union, NAFTA on the other side of the world, and all the others - that in the end, we all contribute to the development of world trade, to continuing growth in the various economies around the world, and if that can be the end result, it can only be good for this part of the world and for Europe as well.

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