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John Hume Hon.

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Peace in Ireland  
Hon. John Hume, M.P., M.E.P.  
Northern Ireland

Issued by: Center for International Studies  
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St. Louis, MO 63121-4499

## PEACE IN IRELAND

Acceptance of the Global Citizen Award  
University of Missouri - St. Louis  
January 10, 1998  
by The Honorable John Hume, M.P., M.E.P.

Chancellor, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen:

I am obviously very honored to be here with you this evening, and to receive this award. But I don't see it simply as an award to myself, but I see it as a powerful expression of your enormous goodwill and support for peace in my country, and I thank you for that.

And it comes at a very crucial time, as well, because as you may be aware, I will be flying back tomorrow to be there Monday morning--because on Monday morning, the peace talks resume, involving the British and Irish governments and all the major parties in the north of Ireland. And it is a very crucial time. And in spite of all the hiccups, as there always are, when you're working hard for peace, against the sort of background that we have. In spite of that, when you consider that if someone had said, a few years ago, the British and Irish governments would be in the one room--together with Sinn Fein (the political wing of the IRA), my own party, (the Social Democratic and Labor Party), the unionist parties, and the parties representing the Unionist paramilitary organizations. If someone had said two years ago, that we'd all be in one room, that person would have been referred to a psychiatrist--but it has happened, and we're meeting on Monday again to resume the talks process under the chair of Senator George Mitchell, here from the United States--to whom we owe a great debt for his patience and hard work with us. But as I say, the very fact that we are together, is progress in itself and the foundation.

Because if we are to solve this problem, and all these parties are agreed that the heart

of the problems is three sets of relationships that have to be sorted out, by agreement. Relationships, obviously within the north of Ireland, and relationships within Ireland itself between north and south, and relationships between Britain and Ireland. And obviously the best way to solve those relationships is to have the two governments together in the one room, with all the parties. That is major progress.

But now we face the major challenge, the very major challenge of, for the first time in our history, reaching that agreement. Because our quarrel has gone on for a long time. And I sometimes tell people, when they ask me, because it such a serious situation -- but sometimes I try to be somewhat lighthearted, when people ask me to sum up the Irish problem. I say the trouble with the English is that they never remember. And the trouble with the Irish is that they never forget. And indeed, for example, my political opponents from the unionist community in northern Ireland, they fight every single election with a slogan --and what's the slogan?--"Remember 1690"--and that's when the quarrel started.

But the last 25 years, and I've lived through them, have been, I think, among the worst, throughout the quarrel that has gone on for centuries. Because in a population of about a million and a half in the north of Ireland-- 3,500 people have lost their lives. And over 30,000 people have been maimed or injured. That's the equivalent of one out of five hundred people losing their lives; that's the equivalent of one out of fifty people being maimed or injured. There is no where in the north of Ireland, where every citizen doesn't know someone who was killed or who was maimed. My own neighbor was killed on Bloody Sunday. And indeed, yesterday, in Derry, Senator Edward Kennedy visited the Bloody Sunday relatives in the bog side.

But those deaths and injuries are the symptoms, and the terrible tragic symptoms, of the failure to resolve our problem. And, as I often say, our problem is very strongly expressed by the fact in that the City of Belfast, which is the highest church going city in western Europe--it's been necessary to build thirteen walls to separate and protect one



section of a Christian people from another. I often use those walls in my speeches to say to people, 'those walls are an indictment of all of us in Ireland, past and present, because what they scream at us is that our past attitudes have built them.' And the positive way to look at them today is that they are a challenge to us--to **re-examine** those past attitudes. Because if we are to have peace, lasting peace and stability in Ireland, then those walls have to come down--and we have to live together in agreement on that island. And the way to do so is to accept those walls as a challenge to our past attitudes--on both sides--and both sides have to recognize that they should be re-examined.

Let's look at the Unionist people for a moment. The mind sets that exist in our community in Northern Ireland, if you look at them, and if you look at conflict anywhere in the world, you'll find that the same mind sets exist. Unionist mind set, Unionist people (largely the Protestant population) wish to protect their identity and their difference. And in my opinion they are totally entitled to do that, because humanity is richer for its diversity. And there is not a society in the world, which doesn't have differences. Not two people in this room are the same. Difference is of the essence of humanity; and I have no quarrel with them seeking to protect their identity and their difference.

My quarrel is with their methods, and their traditional method which I have called the "Afrikaner mind set"--has been that the only way to protect their interests and their identity, was to hold all power in their own hands, and exclude anyone who wasn't one of them. And I grew up in the Northern Ireland that they governed. From 1921-1972--they governed it as one party, holding all power in their own hands. They wouldn't give a job to a Catholic. One of their prime ministers, Lord Brookeborough, had an ad in the paper, looking for people to work in his estate "No Catholic need apply," he put in the advertisement. Discrimination was wide spread in jobs and housing and in voting rights.

That is bound to lead to conflict. That can't protect your identity at the end of the day. My challenge to the Unionist people is "look, because of your geography and your numbers, this problem can't be solved without you; therefore come to the table--sit down with the rest of us, and let's reach an agreement for a new Ireland, which will respect our differences--but allow us to work together in our very substantial common interests.

And there's a Nationalist tradition--which is largely the Catholic population, and indeed a tradition that has a lot of identity that people identify with in this country. And the mind set there, as I have argued very strongly, has been a territorial mind set: 'Ireland is our land, and you Unionists are a minority, and therefore you can't stop us uniting.' And that sounds alright, but, when you stop and think--it's people that have rights, not territory.

Without people, even our beautiful island is only a jungle. It's people that make any country what it is. And when people are divided--whether you're talking about Ireland, Cyprus, or the former Yugoslavia--the problem cannot be solved by any form of coercion or victory--and it certainly cannot be solved by violence and killing human beings. And the handed-down version of patriotism in my country with which we all grew and heard was the notion of "dying for Ireland." But as we who live on the streets know, there is a very thin line between dying for Ireland and "killing for Ireland."

And my argument against that mind set is very clear. If I am seeking human rights for my people, as I am--and civil rights--then how can I do it if I were using a method that undermines the most fundamental right of all--the right to life? And all the killing and violence does is DEEPEN THE DIVISION and produce violence on the other side. And the victims of that violence have been very innocent Catholics. For example, near where I live is a ??gray steel bar.?? Then one night --drinking--normally, in comes a gunman and just six people dead. That happens very often. In other words violence breeds violence, and deepens the divisions--or to quote a very powerful quotation from



Martin Luther King, that I always use, the old doctrine of “ ‘an eye for an eye’ leaves everybody blind.” Violence has no role to play, and that we have to learn.

What we have to learn is that given that we are a divided people on the island of Ireland--then the answer is agreement--to come to the table and reach agreement. And once we reach that agreement, what ever form it takes--then our quarrel is over, and we start working together. The real solution starts. Because a border in Ireland--and we've got to get rid of the simplistic mind sets that have been handed down over the years. The border in Ireland isn't a line in the map. It's in the minds and hearts of people. Because now we're all part of the European community and there is in fact no border. There's freedom of movement of goods, services and people. Now you can drive across the border, but as I say, the real border is in the minds and hearts of people. And to remove that requires a healing process, when you're talking about Ireland or Cyprus or the former Yugoslavia. And what we have to do is create the framework, within which that healing process can take place.

What I mean by that is quite clear, and I've been very heavily inspired by my own European experience. When I was first elected to the European Parliament in 1979, we sat in Strasbourg, which is right on the German border (Strasbourg and France)--in fact there's a bridge across the river, across a canal from Strasbourg to Germany--I went for a walk, across the bridge-- and stopped and thought (this is 1979) “Thirty years ago” I thought to myself ( 1949) “if someone had stood on this bridge--the second World War had just ended--35 million people dead across the continent for the second time in a century--and for centuries the peoples of Europe slaughtered one another. If someone had said, thirty years ago, we will all be together in thirty years time, in a new united Europe, and the Germans will still be German and the French will still be French--that person would have been--as I say, ‘sent off somewhere.’”

But it happened. And how did it happen--because how it happened, ought to be studied everywhere, because it is the greatest example in history of the world of conflict



resolution. The peoples of Europe decided that difference is not a threat. That difference is natural. Every conflict that you can think of--what's it about? It's about seeing difference as a threat. Whether the difference is your religion, your nationality, your race or your ethnicity.

And the lesson that has to be learned as the people of Europe learned: difference is an accident of birth. There's not one person in this room who chose to be born. There's not one person in the world who chose to be born--nor did we choose to be born into any particular community. Therefore, why should we fight about that difference? The answer to difference, the peoples of Europe learned, is to respect it--and to build institutions which respect their differences: a Council of European Ministers, a European Parliament--with all the peoples represented, and a European Civil Service, representing all the peoples.

Working together in their common interests, which were economic, and leaving aside their differences and their quarrels--but working the common ground together--spilling their sweat, as I often say, and not their blood. And by doing that--they gradually broke down the barriers of centuries. And there's that new Europe, there now, all together, working together in their common interest.

We have to do exactly the same on our small island: build institutions, which respect our differences, but allow us to work together in our very substantial common interest--which is very substantial, particularly in the economic front--because at the end of the day--if you can't earn a living in the land of your birth--is it much use to you? And therefore we should be concentrating on that common ground.

And if we do build the institutions--and work together in our common interest--spill our sweat, and not our blood--the real healing process will begin--when the real border in the minds and hearts of the Irish people will erode and the new Ireland will evolve--in the way that the new Europe has evolved. And its model in a generation or two will

probably be very different from the traditional models of the past.

That's the challenge that faces us. And as we face that challenge, we know we have massive support in this land from the Irish diaspora in particular. And, indeed your president has come out very strongly in support--because we know that if we reach that agreement--that the economic support on the common ground will be very massive--in terms not only of inward investment, but in marketing the products of our small country. If every Irish American spent \$5.00 a week on Ireland, do you know how much it would be for the Irish economy? Ten billion dollars a year (I can count, you know).

But, in other words, I believe, and given that today's world is a much smaller world--we're living through the biggest revolution in the history of the world-- a technological, telecommunication, and transport revolution--it's a much smaller world. A world in which we cannot live apart--and a massive opportunity for the Irish diaspora to re-link with the homeland. And as I say, give as massive assistance in the common ground process of breaking down the barriers, that have divided us for centuries--and help bring the new Ireland to evolve. As I say, that's the challenge that faces us; and of course in doing so, let us also remember this country as well, and I often talk about this.

America is seen in the world as an economic power and as a military power. But in fact when you look at it's roots and foundations, it's probably one of the strongest moral powers in the world. Do you know any country more diverse than America, when you look at the people who live here, and where they come from--the many different countries, and so on. And yet, look at it--and look at the message that comes from that foundation. It's written on a dime in three words, which I often quote. And if you don't know what the three words are on the dime, go to the grave of Abraham Lincoln, and there you will see them, "e-pluribus unum"--three Latin words, "from many we are one". The essence of unity, is respect for diversity. That's the lesson we have to learn in Ireland. That's the lesson we are working towards building--because unity isn't victory by one side over another.



And, as we move into this year, which is the 300th anniversary of the 1798 rising in Ireland, which was heavily influenced by the Presbyterian community--as well as the Catholic community--both communities, that were suffering at that time. Indeed the Presbyterians were driven out of Ireland and played a major role in building this country. The Declaration of Independence was printed by John Dunlap from Strabane. He learned to print in Strabane, before he was driven out. And of course, the first secretary of the American Congress was from County Derry, John Thompson. And as I say, we now have the opportunity, of putting that philosophy, of that period into action. Catholic, Protestant, and dissenter, living together in peace and harmony--with respect for one another. And let us hope that we will achieve that dream very soon. And that "e-pluribus unum" will apply to Ireland as well --"from many we are one."

But the essence of our unity will be respect for our diversity. And as we move into the next century, let it be the first century in our island's history, in which there will be no killing in our streets--and no immigration of our young to other lands. And in which because of the smaller world, all those of Irish ancestry, and descent can rejoin Ireland--and all spill our sweat together. And it can become a great off-shore island. Not just to the United States of Europe, but of the United States of America.

Thank You.

You may have some questions you would like to put to me, and I would be very glad to answer them:

Q. The question is what will be discussed at the meeting on Monday morning.

A. The meeting on Monday morning is the talks process that are designed to lead to agreement. That's the purpose of them, and therefore the matters that would be discussed would be the key issues that go to the heart of our divisions and conflicts, i.e. the three sets of relationships: 1) How are we going to share northern Ireland together.



2) How are we going to share Ireland together? 3) What relationship are we going to have with Britain? And what proposals will each party be putting forward on each of those three fronts. That's what we will be discussing. And as I said earlier, my hope would be that, and of course, one of the points I didn't make during my speech was--that we have agreed (and it was a proposal that my party put)--that if we do reach agreement--that agreement would be put to the people of Ireland, North and South on the one day in a referendum--seeking a yes from each. Of course that would be very powerful, because it would be the first time in our history that the people of Ireland as a whole would have spoken about how we live together--and if that agreement was approved in that way, that would really end all the quarrels. And all energies then, would be devoted to working together. And of course, as I think is very obvious--once you start working together, with people who have difference--people realize that their common humanity is greater than anything else--and the real barriers start to break down. The real healing process that I talked earlier about will start.

Q. [ Inaudible]

A. I think you'd say that in Ireland, people see it is a religious quarrel-- and that's a bit simplistic. It goes a bit deeper than that. The quarrel started at the time of the Reformation. The settlers were Protestant and the natives were Catholic. So the religious difference goes deeper. It's more about the nationalities and the Protestant people who regard themselves as British and the Catholic people who are natives of Ireland--so it's deeper than that, although there are some political practices that are quite--well, I wouldn't call it religious in attitude, they think it is, but I call it bigotry. But, as I've said, if we get could get that agreement--when you think it is necessary to build walls to separate all sections of a Christian people from one another, you would ask yourself sometimes the question: "Where has the fundamental [precept] of Christianity gone? "Love thy neighbor..."

Q. In this process they often talk about the importance of leadership--and I think about the leadership--most people will talk to you because they see you as a leader of your people, not necessarily a leader of the Republican Party. This process creates difficulties. And I wonder your position in the party --has it been difficult to maintain your respect within your party?

A. Oh no, my party solidly supported what I have been doing. There is no doubt about that. In politics you know, there's always other parties saying this and that. Actually I think about this particularly in terms of my talks with Gerry Adams, which led to heavy criticism of myself in particular. But, as your Chancellor quoted me, at the time I said "when 20,000 British soldiers can't stop the killings in my streets, and I can stop it by talking, I'm going to do it." One of the biggest problems in our society was the violence and the deaths and it is very commonplace to do everything in your power to stop that. All right what happened was, throughout the last 25 years there has been a deep divide and a deep debate between my own party, the Socialist Democratic Labor Party and Sinn Fein about our approach. And we strongly oppose violence throughout for the reasons that I gave earlier. But that debate has taken place and then: knowing, that they were a tradition born in Ireland, you know and that the Irish tradition was handed down, I was challenging them to state their reasons for violence, knowing what their reasons were. There were traditional Irish reasons: number one, the British were in Ireland to protect their own interests by force therefore we, the Irish, we have the right to use force to put them out and number two, they are preventing the Irish people from exercising the right to self determination.

My response to that was: yes, in the past Britain definitely did have an interest in being in Ireland. Britain came into Ireland in the first place because of our links with France and Spain, etc. and wanted to close Ireland as a back door for her European enemies. But, I argued, in today's new Europe, I argued, that is no longer so--because we're all together--Britain, Ireland, Germany, France, Spain. But the legacy remains, today's problem is a divided people to share the piece of earth together--and that can only be



resolved in agreement. And, secondly, yes the Irish people, that is the people that live there, have the right to self determination. But unfortunately they're divided from the rights to be exercised. Now that started a major debate, and then I got a request at private talks about it, and basically, they challenged me, "you prove what you're saying," and it will lead in the end to a cease fire. So the talking between Gerry Adams and I led to a preparation of a declaration to get the British government together with the Irish government to make a declaration saying basically "that the British have no economic or strategic interest in remaining in Ireland--that it was a matter for the Irish people themselves, North and South, to sort out their differences--and if they reached the agreement the British would legislate for it. And we eventually got them to say that in the Downing Street declaration and that led to the cease fires.

Now, when you hear the full story about those talks which took place between Gerry and myself, I would presume you will agree with me that it only common sense. Because you see there are some people, you see, that believe the world never changes. You wouldn't run a corner shop today, the way you ran it in 1912 or 1916. The world has changed enormously, and you certainly wouldn't run it the way you ran it in 1690. You see the world has changed, and we're living today in a post- nationalist Europe.

Once upon a time, the nation-state--there are those people who believe that nationalism is eternal and that the nation-state is eternal. But before the nation-state you had city-states, even clans and tribes-- then the world got smaller and we grew into countries and that's where the nation-state began. And of course when history is written, the worst period in the history of the world, in my opinion, is the era of the nation-state, because it was the nation-state that led to imperialism and two world wars about nationalism. All nations fighting one another because they felt they were better and one nation would go in and imperialize other countries. So you say now you should move into the next century, we'll move beyond that. The world is becoming smaller and we can't live apart--and that interdependence is already being expressed in



European Union but it was expressed a long time ago in this country. When you think of the constitution of this country, it's not the simple majority run country, when you consider all the states or when you consider the separation of the powers between President and Congress--there's a lot of lessons to be learned by all countries, as to how to divide power and share power so that difference is respected and people have a say in how they are governed.

Q. I would like to say, however, that while I agree one issue is about diversity there is another issue about power differential. Even in this country we celebrate diversity but we never really deal with that issue about how people don't have the same access to the economic and political power and I think the question many of us would have is what can be the motivation? Because the power is not equally divided. So, it is not just a matter of agreement. Everybody has got to give up something but one group has to give up more because it has more power. And, what would be their motivation to do that?

A. Well, I agree with you, that ...democracy is not a simple majority rule--as some people would suggest--that's only democracy in a society where you have uniformity. Where you have a divided society, where the divisions are race or ethnicity or whatever you need a different form of constitution to include everyone, that's what Federalism is about. You know, when you look at, for example, in Switzerland, with the divisions there, yet you have the most successful economy in the world because they recognize their differences, and it is reflected in their system of government. Similarly, in Germany with the Lander, it is a form of Federalism as well. But that's what we have to do in the institutions that we bring forward, and as you know the last time in the early 1970s when we had talks that led to an agreement between ourselves and the Unionists--the form of government that we agreed on for Northern Ireland was what we called "power sharing"--that both communities would be represented in government and that there would be a Council of Ireland between north and south, so that both parts of the island would work together for a New Ireland. That was brought down at the time

because Paisley and others led people on to the streets against it. And I would agree with you that we have to construct a form of government which respects difference and is inclusive of the sections of the society, in other words, it requires new thinking on all sides, but the Irish are very good at generating new thinking.

Q. Can you give us some examples of power sharing in the context of the Northern Ireland situation. What does it mean on the streets?

A. What we mean in fact, this is a system of government that it would be guaranteed within legislation that the government would be mixed and not be confined to one section of the community. Now, if you have 20 or 30 years of that, a whole new society will evolve. The old barriers will be broken down. But at the moment, my party puts that philosophy into practice. In the city of Derry, the second city which is the worst example of injustice of the old Northern Ireland. The unionists were 30% of the population and they governed the city, by a system of gerrymandering and control of housing and jobs. And, the unemployment, it was terrible, it's still very high, we're still trying to cure it. My own father was unemployed and couldn't get a job. You know, that was very common in Northern Ireland. But now my party is the majority party in the city. What did we do? We put in practice, our philosophy of respect for diversity. One year the mayor is our party (SDLP), the next year the mayor is a Unionist. This year for example the mayor is a young SDLP man and the deputy mayor is a Unionist from Paisley's party. Now we could take every position. We also give chairs to each party: Sinn Fein, has a chair--the Unionists have a chair--we have a chair of the different committees. In other words, we put into practice, and we could take every chair, and we could take the mayor and deputy mayor; because we have majority rule--but we don't do it because what that does is shows respect for difference and then as a team spreads we're working to build the city and recently we have been somewhat successful in building a new Derry. It's now European headquarters of DuPont. It's now the European headquarters of Fruit of the Loom. It's now the European headquarters of Seagate, the biggest hi-tech company in Silicon Valley. Now its \_\_\_\_\_



International of Boston, Mass. So, you know, as I say, we're building a new Derry-- that's how we're doing it at a local level. We would like to see the agreement at the national level, producing a similar approach. And we would like to see, obviously, a council of ministers between north and south where we would both work together to build a new Ireland together. And by working that way together, break down the barriers, the old, the real border, in time, which is in the minds and hearts of people.

Q. Can you explain something about the status of the para-military organizations in the prison, from what I read -- it seems to me they have an amount of autonomy and power that would be unthinkable in American prisons. I am curious as to how that situation evolved, and how it might change in light of recent developments

A. Well, the prisons: There are more prisons in Northern Ireland than there would be in a normal society because of the para-military activity. A couple of new prisons had to be built, but because also the fact that the prisons contain people from IRA and the UDA and UDF Loyalist groups, obviously it is necessary to keep them separate in those prisons--you wouldn't have them all together in the one cell for obvious reasons--so for that reason, common sense reasons, they are in different wings--of the prisons, and of course, there is also, as you would expect, a big movement about the prison situation in relation to prisoners being released, and all that sort of thing, and there's been a lot of -- just before Christmas there was an awful tragedy. In the first place someone brought guns into the prison, and a group called the Irish National Liberation Army, a very tiny minority Republican group, they shot one of the leaders of the minority Loyalist group in the prison--he was a prisoner. How they got the guns in, I wonder. And how did they know he would be out receiving a visitor at a particular time, so that the way they shot him hit was it in the ribs in the lower right. So all of that raises questions, which are being discussed at the minute, how all that happened. But the one thing that we shouldn't do is allow these events to de-rail the peace process. Because there are certain elements and extremes, I mean the IRA have stuck to their cease fire very solidly and very strongly and so have the main Loyalist organizations. It is



these two minor groups that are trying to stir it up again, and what we shouldn't do is allow that to de-rail us, and my honest view is that you know once you look at it if we can reach agreement--one of the things you have to do is leave the past behind us. And the victims of the past have been many because the past created the terrible present--so we need a new future. I believe in drawing the line with the past and to reach agreement and let history judge it.

The worst victims of the past were those who lost a spouse, and tragically and unfortunately we cannot bring them out of their graves. But let us build an eternal monument to them that they are the last generation to have suffered. And similarly prisoners in their own way are victims of our past. In the sense that they were reared with these different notions of patriotism in Ireland and one thing and another on this side and on the other side. And they are victims of the past as well. So I think we should take all those things into account when we come to a final settlement. I think that if we reach that agreement, and the people endorse it in the referendum, I think you will have a great new atmosphere and that a new Ireland will emerge and I think it would be very powerful over here among our friends and that we will start showing results very quickly. There are some questions I can't answer in public for obvious reasons.

Q. Welcome to St. Louis again. Thank you very much for a lot of the things you've done over the past years. You mentioned the power sharing executive, in the early '70s and the fact that when Ian Paisley and the UDP, they brought it down.

[Hume: Together with the Ulster workers that's what they call themselves and the other para-militaries.]

Q. (continuing). And I think there is another element, and I think it's hard to say that at a point the British government at that time, did not have the stomach to stand up and the fact that the power sharing executive...

[Hume: That's right, that's right.]

[Q continuing] In 1998, with Ian Paisley's UDP, you're standing outside your party's role

in this peace process, what can you say to this group of people here tonight that would make you think that Paisley will not try to do the same thing, and more importantly, would make you think that the British government would not favor control by\_\_\_\_\_

A. Well, you're quite right. The last time the British government--were very weak Didn't stand up at all to the threats on the streets organized by Paisley and the Ulster workers transit strike, but this time the difference is the two governments, the British government and Irish government are now together involved and with the parties directly in bringing about, working to bring about, a settlement and in addition to that, for the first time ever, it is up to the people --if the majority in the north say "yes" and the majority in the south say "yes" they cannot complain at all. Because the majority of the people of the north have said "Yes."

And I'll end up with a story I tell often when I was in \_\_\_\_\_ last year. And I was saying to Ian Paisley, I said if I took the word "no" from the English language, you would be speechless. You know what he said, he said, "No I wouldn't."