

Letter from the British and Irish governments to the political parties in Northern Ireland on (the morning of) Saturday 6 May 2000

This letter, sent on Saturday morning, sets out the governments' proposals necessary to secure full implementation of the agreement by June 2001, in addition to those already set out in our statement.

Rights, safeguards and equality of opportunity

As has already been announced, incorporation of the EHCR into British and Irish domestic law will take effect from October 2000. The British government has already invited the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission to advise on the scope for defining rights supplementary to the convention.

Under the legislation which came into effect in January, all designated public authorities in Northern Ireland will begin to have equality schemes in place from July 1st, 2000.

The Irish Commission on Human Rights will be established by the Irish Government in July 2000 so that the joint committee of both human rights commissions required under the agreement will therefore be established by the end of July 2000.

Both governments will continue to take measures and develop programmes to support the victims of violence and their families.

The British government will ratify the Council of Europe Charter on Regional or Minority Languages by September 2000, and publish within six months an action plan for implementing the charter. Technical discussions on the steps required further to extend TG4 reception in Northern Ireland will continue. Other measures will also be taken, including a two-year Irish-language TV and film production pilot scheme, which will start by April 2001.

Security

The British government will progressively take all the necessary steps to secure as early a return as possible to normal security arrangements in Northern Ireland, consistent with the level of threat. It will report regularly on the steps taken and will consult with the Irish Government, and the political parties as appropriate, on measures necessary to respond to any continuing paramilitary activity.

In particular, both governments will continue to oppose with resolute and determined action any group that uses or threatens violence to disrupt the peace process, taking whatever measures within the law are justified by the threat.

Policing and justice

Legislation to implement the Patten report will, subject to Parliament, be enacted by November 2000. The new Policing Board will be appointed in January 2001 and will assume its responsibilities in April 2001. A new independent police recruitment agency will be established, and the first process for recruits to join the Police Service of Northern Ireland will start in April 2001.

The British government has already announced a six-month consultation process on the Criminal Justice Review to end in September, so the government will announce its decisions on implementation in October 2000. Legislation, and a detailed timetable for implementation, will be published by April 2001.

Prisoners

It is intended that, in accordance with the Good Friday agreement, all remaining prisoners qualifying for early release will be released by July 28th, 2000. Measures will continue to be taken to facilitate the reintegration of prisoners into the community, and to address related issues.

We are writing in similar terms to the leaders of other parties represented in the Assembly and of the UDP.