

Press release: Secretary of State for Northern Ireland statement on political talks

The sickening attack that led to the death of Lyra McKee has deeply shocked everyone across the world.

Lyra was a brilliant, talented journalist. She was a role model to many who always fought to make Northern Ireland a better place.

Since Lyra's death communities across Northern Ireland and the political spectrum have come together – united in condemnation at this murderous act – and they have delivered a clear message:

The people responsible for this act of terrorism have absolutely nothing to offer Northern Ireland and have no place in society.

Due to the hard work, resilience and commitment of the people of Northern Ireland, along with those we entrust to uphold the rule of law, the security situation is transformed.

But there remain small numbers of dissident republicans who remain intent on killing.

Our challenge is to ensure that we continue to work for peace for the whole community. Northern Ireland today is a dynamic, modern, outward looking place and it is open to everyone regardless of their community background, political aspirations, race, gender or sexuality.

Lyra symbolised the new Northern Ireland and her tragic death cannot be in vain.

All of us must take inspiration from what Lyra achieved in her life and work even harder to make Northern Ireland a brighter, more peaceful and prosperous place for everyone.

As Secretary of State, my absolute determination is to see the restoration of all the political institutions established by the 1998 Agreement.

That Agreement has formed the bedrock of peace and progress here since it was reached just over 21 years ago. It must be upheld and it must be defended from those who would seek to undermine it.

Northern Ireland needs its political leaders to stand together and work with each other in the spirit of unity and togetherness – now more than ever.

That is why, the PM and Taoiseach, in their statement earlier today, called formal political talks to restore the Executive, commencing on the 7 May.

The talks will take place in full accordance with the well-established three stranded approach to which we remain committed. There will also be a meeting of the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference (BIIGC) on the 8 May.

Both our teams will be working with the parties on an intensive period of preparation to get ready for those talks.

The Tanaiste and I will do everything in our power to make those talks a success, but we need Northern Ireland's political leaders to do everything they can to ensure we emerge with an agreement, restore the Executive, and build a better future for the people of Northern Ireland.

Over 21 years ago Northern Ireland's political leaders reached the Belfast Agreement, and showed how coming together for the benefit of the whole community can achieve truly ground-breaking and remarkable things.

These talks offer us a chance to move forward, restore the political institutions and deliver for the people of Northern Ireland.

I am determined to ensure we use this opportunity to succeed in doing just that. We have a narrow window in which genuine progress can be made and we must act now.