

Statement to parliament: Secretary of State Oral Statement on Political Talks

Oral Statement for the Secretary of State

Mr Speaker,

With permission I wish to make a statement about the political process in Northern Ireland.

Last week I came to this House and delivered a statement in the aftermath of the sickening attack that led to the death of Lyra McKee.

The day after both the Prime Minister and I attended her funeral at St Anne's Cathedral in Belfast along with political leaders from across Northern Ireland and Ireland.

It was, as many RH and HM's will be aware an incredibly emotional and touching event ... where I heard moving and powerful testimony from Lyra's parents and members of the community.

That was a day to grieve, and a day to reflect on a brilliant young life that was cut down by terrorism.

All of us heard a clear message that day ... from inside the Cathedral ... from the powerful testimony of Father Magill ... from the streets of Creggan and Londonderry ... and from Northern Ireland's political leaders.

No more.

No more violence, no more division, and no more delay.

Northern Ireland's political leaders must come together now ... and must work together to stand firm against those who oppose peace and the political process ... and work to build a genuinely shared future for all the people of Northern Ireland.

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, I have always made clear that my absolute priority is to see the restoration of all the political institutions established by the Belfast Agreement.

The Belfast 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 now more than ever.

That is why in Belfast last Friday I called formal political talks to restore the Executive, commencing on the 7 May.

Those talks will involve the UK Government, the five Northern Ireland political parties who are eligible to form an Executive and the Irish Government for matters on which they have responsibilities.

They will be conducted in full accordance with the Belfast Agreement and the well-established three stranded approach to which this Government remains committed.

There will also be a meeting of the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference on the 8 May.

Mr Speaker, there is much to do, and many challenges ahead. It is incumbent upon all of us to do all that we can to make these talks a success.

Northern Ireland needs its Government back up and delivering for the people of Northern Ireland.

From now until the start of talks my team and I will be working with the parties on an intensive period of preparation to prepare for those talks.

Both the UK and Irish Governments have been clear that we will do everything in our power to make these talks a success, but we cannot do it alone.

No Government can impose an agreement from the outside.

We need Northern Ireland's political leadership to do everything they can to ensure we emerge with an agreement to restore the Executive and build a better future for the people of Northern Ireland.

We have a narrow window in which genuine progress can be made and we must act now.

Mr Speaker, I hope all members of this House will appreciate that, to give these talks the best chance of success, there is a responsibility on all of us to give the parties some time and some space to talk.

While I will of course seek to keep this House updated, I will not provide a running commentary on negotiations.

What I will be doing, Mr Speaker, is doing everything I can to give these talks the best possible chance of success. I know all of us in this House and

in the other place want to see these talks succeed.

Mr Speaker – this week has been a difficult time for us all. The murder of Lyra McKee was an attack not just on Lyra or our police service. It was an attack on us all.

Since that sickening attack in Derry, Northern Ireland's political leaders have shown great leadership in standing up together to reject violence.

But now it is time for us to go further.

Mr Speaker, the best possible way of showing those who oppose peace and democracy is to show that their efforts are futile ... and for all the political institutions of the Belfast Agreement to be fully restored and functioning as was intended by those who reached that historic Agreement 21 years ago.

The stability and safety provided by the Agreement has allowed Northern Ireland to thrive – Northern Ireland is now a leading destination for inward investment, unemployment at a record low and employment at an all-time high. Northern Ireland needs a devolved government – to allow for local decision-making, to continue to strengthen the economy and to build a united and prosperous community.

I will be doing all I can to make that happen.

I commend this statement to the House.