

# DOWNING STREET DECLARATION

Resource

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A Digitisation and  
Outreach Project from  
the Linen Hall Library

A  
GCSE  
Toolkit



**DIVIDED  
SOCIETY**

Northern Ireland 1990 - 1998

Photo courtesy of REUTERS/Alamy



# Project and Curriculum Information

## Introduction

This education resource was created as part of the Linen Hall Library's 'Divided Society' project. It is a learning tool aimed at GCSE students studying the 1990s period, however those studying politics and history subjects will also find its material relevant. The resource can be used to stimulate debate and will help towards the development of empathy and understanding of the topic. Included in the resource are samples of political cartoons, newspaper front pages and political posters. Materials are held at the Linen Hall Library.

## Key areas of interest include:

- Ceasefires
- Bill Clinton's Visit
- The Good Friday Agreement
- The Referendum
- First Day of Power-Sharing

## Students will develop skills in:

- Research
- Thinking critically/analysing
- Reading/using primary sources
- Developing an understanding of history's value and significance for today's society
- Developing an awareness of how the past has been represented, interpreted and given significance for different reasons and purposes
- Acquiring an understanding of different identities within society and an appreciation of social, cultural, and religious diversity
- Recognising that their historical knowledge and skills help them understand the present and also provides them with a basis for their role as responsible citizens, as well as for the possible further study of history.



# The Downing Street Declaration

The Downing Street Declaration was an agreement between the UK and Ireland on a peaceful way forward for Northern Ireland. It enshrined the principle of consent which meant only the people of Northern Ireland could determine its constitutional future. It was signed by the then British Prime Minister John Major and the Irish Taoiseach Albert Reynolds on the 15th of December 1993. The moment was described as a day of hope for a peaceful future, though it did not bring an immediate end to the violence. The document is seen as part of the development towards the Good Friday Agreement.





# End violence and join talks, premiers tell paramilitaries

16 December 1993

The IRA has been challenged to end its campaign of violence and join the search for a political settlement in Northern Ireland.

The call came yesterday from Taoiseach Albert Reynolds and Prime Minister John Major in a day of extraordinary political development.

The two premiers agreed a landmark declaration which outlines Ireland's right to self-determination and at the same time states boldly to Unionists that change without their consent will not take place.

They said Republicans could join a process leading to participation in revamped political talks after three months of the IRA ordering an end to its campaign of violence.

Mr Major said the Republican movement had been given an opportunity. "I hope they will pick it up. That is for them. I cannot compel them to do so. I simply say the option is there in a way it has not been before. I hope they will have the wit to take it."

But, he warned, "If they lose this opportunity, it may never come their way again."

Mr Reynolds made an equally forceful plea "to give peace the best possible chance."

Last night SDLP leader John Hume confirmed he would have more talks with Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams as it became evident that pressure was steadily growing on the IRA to call off the violence.

Sinn Féin is to study the Downing Street declaration before making any announcement, but spokesman Mitchel McLaughlin admitted initially it was "disappointed." The IRA made no comment.

Loyalist paramilitaries said they were examining the document and would deliver their verdict soon.

The Downing Street declaration was enthusiastically received by Dáil Éireann where the Taoiseach was given

a rapturous welcome on his return. The House of Commons also backed Mr Major. Support came from all sides in the house apart from the DUP. The Ulster Unionists, adopting a wait-and-see approach, were lukewarm about the contents of the declaration but did not attack the government.

DUP leader Ian Paisley went on the offensive earlier in the day when he accused the British Leader of "treachery" and selling Northern Ireland "to buy off the fiendish Republican scum."

In Washington President Bill Clinton welcomed the declaration and vowed to "contribute in any appropriate way."

He said the joint statement created a "historic opportunity to end the tragic cycle of bloodshed" in Northern Ireland.

The meeting of the two Prime Ministers began promptly at 11am yesterday after a night of frenetic telephone diplomacy between Dublin and London. Mr Reynolds, accompanied by Tánaiste Dick Spring and Justice Minister Máire Geoghegan-Quinn, was warmly welcomed at the door of No. 10 by the Prime Minister.

After initial statements made before reporters, the declaration was released and questions were taken at a press conference inside where the Taoiseach appealed: "Let us have a new beginning. There is a different way than the way that has been pursued for the last 25 years."

He said the declaration demonstrated that the British government was no enemy to the rights of the Nationalist tradition, nor was the Irish government an enemy to the rights of the Unionist tradition.

The scene shifted to the House of Commons while Mr Reynolds returned to Dublin and the Dáil.

The Prime Minister made a further announcement to a packed House and fielded questions on it for 90 minutes. He said the declaration "set out a clear framework under which differences can be negotiated and resolved exclusively by peaceful political means."

He added, "But that can only come about if the men of violence end the killing and commit themselves to the democratic process."

Mr Major vowed that the constitutional guarantee that Northern Ireland would remain part of the United Kingdom unless the majority wanted otherwise was "rock solid."

He rebuffed another attack from the Rev. Ian Paisley who said that "the very nub of the controversy" - Articles 2 and 3 - had not been mentioned. He angrily told Mr Major: "As a public representative, I find it very offensive to be told that in three months time, if the IRA cease from their violence, without any conditions of handing over their weapons or their bomb-making material, that they will be invited as constitutional politicians to sit down."

An angry Prime Minister hit back saying: "The purpose of this agreement and this document is to make sure that 25 years from now your successor does not sit there saying that to the Prime Minister of the day!"

To cheers from both sides of the House, he declared: "I wish to take action to make sure there's no more bloodshed of this sort, no more coffins carried away week after week because politicians will not have the courage to sit down, address the problems and find a way through."

To renewed cheers, he told Mr Paisley: "I am prepared to do that - and if you believe I should not, then you do not understand the responsibilities of the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom!"

SDLP leader John Hume welcomed the document as "one of the most comprehensive declarations that has been made about British-Irish relations in the past 70 years."

He urged: "My appeal to all sections of our people is to read the entire statement in full, and to have no knee-jerk reactions."

Mr Major in a Prime Ministerial broadcast last night reiterated his call on the IRA to give up violence. "The door is open," he said.

Yesterday's dramatic breakthrough came after months of the toughest negotiations.

## General Questions

1. Look at the article on page 3. What is the political significance of the lines above the main headline? 'The British Government agree that it is for the people of the island alone, by agreement between the two parts respectively, to exercise their right of self-determination on the basis of consent, freely and concurrently given, North and South, to bring about a united Ireland, if that is their wish.'

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2. Why is Ian Paisley calling the Downing Street Declaration a 'sell out'?

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3. Who are the key players in the newspaper article?

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4. Explain what the 'principle of consent' means?

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5. Look up reactions to the Downing Street Declaration on the internet. List some of the opinions under the headings below:

Unionist	Nationalist	Paramilitary



## Joint Declaration

'This Joint Declaration is a charter for peace and reconciliation in Ireland. Peace is a very simple, but also a very powerful idea, whose time has come. The Joint Declaration provides from everyone's point of view a noble means of establishing the first step towards lasting peace with justice in Ireland.

The central idea behind the Peace Declaration is that the problems of Northern Ireland, however deep and intractable, however difficult to reconcile, have to be resolved exclusively by political and democratic means. Its objective is to heal the divisions among the people of Ireland.

The Declaration makes it clear that it is for the people of Ireland, North and South, to achieve agreement without outside impediment. The British Government have also declared that they will encourage, enable and facilitate such agreement, and that they will endorse whatever agreement emerges and take the necessary steps to implement it. The language of the Declaration quite clearly makes both Governments persuaders for agreement between the people of Ireland.

The dynamic for future progress must reside in the full use of the democratic political process, in the underlying changes in Irish society, North and South, and in our external environment.

Peace is the first essential for better relationships on this island. The Joint Declaration is only the first stage in the Peace Process. There will never be a better opportunity. Peace will allow us to develop a new atmosphere of trust and co-operation and to establish a new era of détente, which is the only way forward.'



Joint Declaration  
by  
An Taoiseach,  
Mr. Albert Reynolds, T.D.,  
and  
The British Prime Minister,  
The Rt. Hon. John Major, M.P.

15 December 1993

## JOINT DECLARATION

Downing Street



15 December 1993

## Activity

Look up the main points of the Downing Street Declaration on the internet and list the points which both Prime Ministers agreed to.

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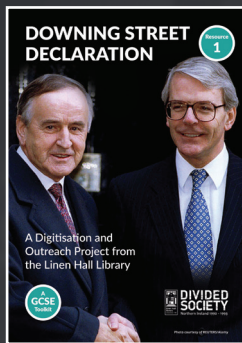
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## DOWNING STREET DECLARATION

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# DIVIDED SOCIETY

Northern Ireland 1990 - 1998

Since 1968 the Linen Hall Library has been collecting material relating to the conflict in Northern Ireland. Over the years the Library has become the repository for a vast amount of material relating to the subject and the subsequent Peace Process.

The Northern Ireland Political Collection now consists of over 350,000 items including books, pamphlets, leaflets, posters, manifestos, press releases, newspapers, objects and many thousands of periodicals. It is a completely unique collection that is unrivalled throughout the world.

The Divided Society project sees a significant section of the Northern Ireland Political Collection digitised. The project is funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, Ulster Garden Villages, and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Hundreds of Periodical titles relating to the conflict have been digitised and made available from the new Divided Society website. These are publications that were published between 1990-1998 in the UK, Ireland and further afield, and documented the issues that affected Northern Ireland during that period.

This was a significant time in Northern Ireland's history and included events such as the Downing Street Declaration, several ceasefires, and the ongoing peace negotiations which culminated in the signing of the Good Friday Agreement.

## Divided Society, Linen Hall Library

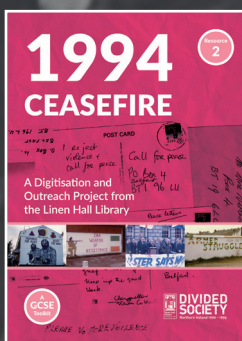
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An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha agus Trádála  
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## 1994 CEASEFIRE

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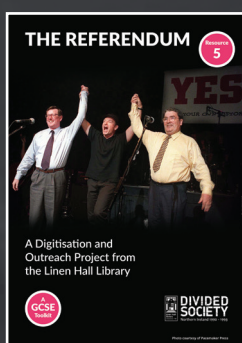
## BILL CLINTON'S VISIT TO NORTHERN IRELAND

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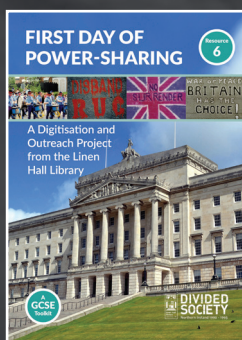
## THE AGREEMENT

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## THE REFERENDUM

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## FIRST DAY OF POWER-SHARING

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### Note of thanks

The Linen Hall Library would like to thank The Irish News, The News Letter, Ian Knox, The Northern Ireland Office, Marian Ferguson, Jim McBride and all those who have assisted with the creation of this education project and allowed us to visit their schools. Without your contribution this would not have been possible.

[www.linenhall.com](http://www.linenhall.com)

[www.dividedsociety.org](http://www.dividedsociety.org)