

Keep up pressure on paramilitaries

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Both The Independent, in its editorial of last Thursday, and the Prime Minister, mistakenly believe that Northern Ireland's problem is "one of the last examples of religious conflict in the world."

The problem is not religious. Our central problem is one of conflicting national identities. I accept that there are other aspects to this problem but they are only added dimensions.

Where similar problems exist, the Government's commitment to human rights and democracy is clear. In Kosovo it has been in the vanguard.

Since these commitments are clearly at the heart of the Government's foreign policy, how much greater is its responsibility to ensure that these are honoured within the United Kingdom itself?

I believe that we have made real progress. The Ulster Unionist Party is committed to strong coalition government among parties from both traditions. The political representatives of the separatist movement in Scotland are not being given a place in government.

Our position is simple. If Sinn Fein will honour its commitment, given to both Prime Ministers at the talks last Friday, by delivering credible and verifiable decommissioning, we will honour our commitment. Moreover, we could honour these commitments at one and the same time to avoid anyone having to make the first move. I believe this is fair and protects the integrity of the process.

Your Editorial is wrong to suggest that the Ulster Unionist Party should make one more historic compromise. This is not merely about implementation of the Belfast Agreement. It is more fundamental than that. It is about an issue that goes to the very heart of democratic values, the protection of democracy against the threat of violence.

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