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Delegation**

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**Statement to Permanent Council of 15 September, 2005: Response
to the Belarusian Statement on events in Belfast**

Firstly, I would like to make clear that I am speaking in my national capacity, and that this statement has the full support of the Irish delegation.

I would like to thank the distinguished Ambassador of Belarus for his statement regarding the situation in Northern Ireland, because it gives me the opportunity to update Permanent Council on events there. You will also find from what follows that there are many errors of fact in what the Ambassador said.

On 10 September following the Whiterock Orange Order parade in Belfast, police and soldiers came under a serious, sustained and violent attack. During the disorder officers were attacked with petrol bombs, blast bombs, other missiles, single shots and automatic gunfire. Throughout Sunday into Monday 12th September there were serious disturbances in Belfast and other areas.

At least 60 police officers were injured during the rioting. The latest information we have is that 63 arrests have been made. Thankfully, there have been no reported fatalities.

The rioting and attacks that were witnessed over the weekend in Northern Ireland are, of course, totally unacceptable. All of us can agree that there can be no ambiguity or excuse for breaking the law. Attempted murder or serious assault, not only against police officers but also on children as young as two, as I have myself seen on television, can in no way be justified.

This violence originated from the unionist community. My Government believes that the vast majority of unionists and people living in the areas affected, including many in the Orange Order, will have been absolutely appalled by what happened.

It goes without saying that the Police and Army had a duty to restore order and to protect others from the rioters. As I have explained, they came under extreme attack on Saturday – as the Chief Constable of Northern Ireland has said, they acted heroically and deserve everyone's support. And I am confident that they attract the support of this Permanent Council.

An extensive amount of information on the weekend's events and the Government's reaction, is available on the websites of the Northern Ireland Office and the Police Service of

Northern Ireland, as well as from a multitude of independent news sources. I would encourage all who want to be better informed about these deplorable events read to the newspapers and follow the broadcasts of the BBC and other news agencies.

Mr Chairman,

All complaints of excessive action by security forces are investigated. The conduct of the Police Service of Northern Ireland is monitored by the well-resourced offices of the independent Police Ombudsman. The Ombudsman and her staff have the power to initiate investigations, as well as to pursue complaints.

Notwithstanding the dreadful violence of last weekend, a political settlement in Northern Ireland is well advanced. So I would appeal to colleagues to avoid over-dramatising this situation.

There is a political plan for peace and a framework for dialogue in place, which involves all concerned in Northern Ireland and the Irish Government.

The delegations of Belarus and the Russian Federation made a strong appeal for OSCE involvement in Northern Ireland. I would like to draw Permanent Council's attention to the fact that there is already a strong international presence on the ground in Northern Ireland in the form of the Independent Monitoring Commission, the International Independent Commission on Decommissioning and the Oversight Commissioner.

Since the last time Northern Ireland was discussed in Permanent Council, the IRA has declared that its armed campaign had come to an end, and that it would dedicate itself to exclusively peaceful and democratic means. The British Government warmly welcomes what the IRA has said.

But words do, of course, need to be carried through in actions – actions that are to be verified by the Independent Monitoring Commission and the International Independent Commission on Decommissioning over the months ahead.

For these reasons, our position remains that we are not convinced that OSCE involvement would further strengthen the peace process at this time.

We would welcome a fuller explanation of what benefits the Belarusian Government feels that OSCE involvement would bring to the Northern Ireland Peace Process at this time, given the national and international structures already in place, and the OSCE's limited resources.

We will of course keep Permanent Council informed of developments.