MEATH PEACE GROUP WELCOMES AGREEMENT ON PHASE ONE OF BREXIT, AND URGES RESTORATION OF NI ASSEMBLY, EXECUTIVE AND NORTH-SOUTH MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

The Meath Peace Group welcomes the hard-won agreement and reassurances in the Phase One agreement of the UK-EU Brexit negotiations. We pay tribute to all who worked to bring about this agreement - the governments, political leaders, diplomats, civil servants, EU officials, and all those others who contributed positively to this outcome. We welcome particularly the restating of the commitment to the peace process, the guarantee of protection for the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement of 1998, the commitments to avoidance of a hard border, to the continuance of the Common Travel Area, the assurances of unfettered access for NI business within the UK internal market, and the continuation of EU citizenship rights for all those in Northern Ireland who wish to avail of them. We note that this is only Phase One and that there is much more work to do in these negotiations, work that will require dialogue and cooperation between the Northern parties, between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and between Ireland and the UK.

As a group who has worked (alongside many others) to foster peace, understanding, healing and respect for almost 25 years now, we have seen much heartening progress, particularly since 1998, but we have also witnessed many worrying setbacks. The increased division and polarisation that has beset the political process in Northern Ireland - particularly within the past year - is now seeping down into the communities, setting back the work of healing and reconciliation. This slippage must be addressed urgently now, and the damaging megaphone diplomacy should be set aside. As we approach the 20th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement, we now call on the political parties in Northern Ireland, the politicians elected in good faith to the NI Assembly by the people of Northern Ireland, and the British and Irish Governments, to urgently set about restoring the NI Assembly, the Executive and the North-South Ministerial Council, enabling the restoration of faith in the political process, stability on the island, improved relations North-South and East-West, and facilitating the necessary dialogue and cooperation required in seeing through the difficult and critical Brexit negotiations in the greater interest of all who live on the island of Ireland.

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