

THE PRESIDENT HAS SEEN
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**PRESIDENT WILLIAM J. CLINTON
REMARKS AT CHRISTMAS TREE LIGHTING
CITY HALL, BELFAST, NORTHERN IRELAND
NOVEMBER 30, 1995**

Acknowledgments: The Lord Mayor of Belfast, Eric Smyth

Ladies and gentlemen, ~~I have been in politics since 1978~~ I have run for election ^{many times} in my home state of Arkansas and ^{of course} throughout the United States when I sought the Presidency -- and I have faced some tough competition. But never have I confronted challengers with the name recognition, the media savvy, and the martial arts ability of the Mighty Morphin Power Rangers. To all of you whose support enabled me to join you tonight, I extend my heartfelt thanks.

It is wonderful to be with all of you tonight and to celebrate the season together. I understand the city of Belfast has held a Christmas Tree Lighting ceremony for more than 20 years -- but this year the occasion is especially joyous, because you are entering your second Christmas of peace.

Now people can do their holiday shopping without worrying about searches or bombs. They can visit their loved ones on the other side of the border without the burden of checkpoints or roadblocks. They can enjoy the sparkling lights of the city without fearing the specter of violence. Peace has brought real change to people's lives.

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Speechwriting

Across the ocean, the American people are rejoicing along with you. Northern Ireland and the United States are joined by strong ties of community, commerce, and culture. Over the years, men and women of both traditions have flourished in America and helped America to flourish.

In this 50th anniversary year of the end of World War II, many Americans still remember the warmth you showed the American Army forces that were stationed here under General Eisenhower. Today it is my privilege to rededicate a plaque laid in 1945, when General Eisenhower returned to Belfast to be awarded the freedom of the city.

General Eisenhower viewed the honor bestowed on him "as a token of our common purpose to work together for a better world." That mission endures today. We remain partners for security, partners for prosperity, and, most important, partners for peace.

Two years ago, at this very spot, tens of thousands of you took part in a day for peace, as a response to some of the worst violence Northern Ireland had known in recent years. The two morning newspapers, representing both traditions, sponsored a telephone poll for peace that generated almost 160,000 calls -- the equivalent of 25 million calls in the United States. The response left no doubt that across Northern Ireland, the desire for peace was becoming a demand.

I am honored to announce today that those same two newspapers -- *The News Letter* and *The Irish News* -- have established the President's Prize, an annual award to those at the grassroots level who have contributed most to peace and reconciliation. The honorees will travel to the

United States to exchange experiences on issues we share -- such as community relations and conflict resolution. We all have much to learn from one another.

The President's Prize will underscore that Northern Ireland's two traditions have a common interest in peace. It will symbolize the bonds between Northern Ireland and the United States -- not least that fully one quarter of America's presidents had roots in this soil. And I hope it will remind us that by coming together tonight, we have taken another step toward the peace that can and should be our legacy to the children of Northern Ireland and the world this Christmas.

As many of you may know, I have received thousands of letters from schoolchildren from all over Northern Ireland, telling me what peace means to them. The letters poured in from villages and cities, from Catholic communities and Protestant communities, from mixed schools, primary schools, and schools for children with special needs. All of the letters were wonderful -- for their honesty, their maturity, and their passion.

Many of the children showed tremendous pride in their homeland -- in its beauty, and in its true nature. Eleven year-old Keith from Carrickfergus wrote: "Please tell everyone in America that we are not always fighting here and that it is only a small number of people who make trouble..."

Like many of the children, Keith did not identify himself as Protestant or Catholic, and did not distinguish between violent forces on either side.

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So many children told me of loved ones they had lost -- of lives disrupted, opportunities forsaken, and families forced to move. Yet they showed remarkable courage and strength -- and a commitment to overcome the past. As 14 year-old Sharon of County Armagh [ar-MAH] wrote, "Both sides have been hurt, both sides must forgive."

[announce two winners here?]

Despite the extraordinary hardships so many of these children have faced, their letters were full of hope and humor and love.

To all of you who took the time to share your thoughts with me, thank you for brightening my holiday season with your words of faith and courage.

To all of you who asked me to do what I could to help the peace take root, I pledge America's support. We will continue to stand with those who take risks for peace. We will work with you to give all of Northern Ireland's children the chance to make the most of their God-given potential.

And to 13 year-old Ryan of Belfast, if you're out there: No, an alien spacecraft did not crash in Roswell, New Mexico in 1947. And if the U.S. Air Force recovered alien bodies and didn't tell anyone about it, it's news to me.

Ladies and gentlemen, citizens of Belfast, friends of my country and the American people: May the Christmas spirit of peace and goodwill flourish and grow in your land (May the prophecy of Isaiah be realized here: "...ye shall go out with joy and be led forward with peace: The mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.")

Q: Catholics and Protestants
shouldn't we have a testament gift-

And may the lights on the tree that we celebrate tonight reflect the kindling of hope and faith in our hearts for a peaceful Northern Ireland.