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## Preface: John Hume: The Architect of Peace

Joseph P. Kennedy II\*

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# Preface: John Hume: The Architect of Peace

Joseph P. Kennedy II

## **Abstract**

This address discusses the work of John Hume who has spoken movingly of the dream of creating a new Ireland free from the divisions that had polarized the island for centuries - a country that would take to heart the motto inscribed on the Great Seal of the United States: "E Pluribus Unum." Throughout it all, John Hume has hewed to the principles that have guided his path for over three decades - that peace must be built on a foundation of respect for all. "The real division in Ireland is not the line in the map that we call partition," says John Hume. "That line in the map simply institutionalized a division that has existed for centuries in the hearts and minds of the Irish people. That is where the real border in Ireland lies - in the hearts and minds of the people." When those borders finally come down and a new nation is created by hearts and minds reaching across the old divides, John Hume will surely be known as the architect of peace.

## PREFACE

### JOHN HUME: THE ARCHITECT OF PEACE

*Joseph P. Kennedy II\**

John Hume is often praised these days for having the courage to reach out and seek dialogue with political rivals in order to advance the cause of peace. But that is hardly a measure of the man's real bravery. After British army troops moved into Derry during the civil rights marches of 1969, John Hume confronted water cannons and tanks to stop the aggressive advance of heavily armed soldiers into the ranks of peaceful demonstrators.

Personally and philosophically opposed to political violence, he has endured assassination attempts and bombings with his resolve unshaken. "There are two things you need to know about John Hume," *Irish Times* correspondent Sean Cronin once said. "No one questions his courage and no one questions his pacifism."

During the early years of the Troubles, I had the good fortune to meet John Hume during his visits to the United States when he sometimes stayed in our family home. As someone who knew the sting of state-sanctioned bias, he was deeply committed to transforming his country into a nation where all traditions would be respected. I was impressed by how much he drew his inspiration for peaceful change from the U.S. civil rights movement — from those, like Rosa Parks and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who dedicated their lives to ending apartheid in the United States. John Hume spoke movingly of the dream of creating a new Ireland free from the divisions that had polarized the island for centuries — a country that would take to heart the motto inscribed on the Great Seal of the United States: "E Pluribus Unum."

Twenty-five years later, John Hume's vision of creating a unified land from a diverse population is closer to reality than ever. Just two years ago, Northern Ireland's frozen political landscape seemed to offer no hope of ever thawing. It was then

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\* Member, U.S. House of Representatives [D-Mass.].

that John Hume began a series of discussions with his counterpart at Sinn Fein, Gerry Adams, to accomplish what decades of armed conflict had failed to deliver — a lasting peace.

The risks were enormous, both personally and politically, but worth the chance. Recent history underscored the possible gains: the conflict in the Middle East was moving towards peace after Israel had sat down with the Palestine Liberation Organization and, in South Africa, apartheid was falling in the wake of the Nationalist Party coming to terms with Nelson Mandela's African National Congress.

The consequences of John Hume's courage are even now being written on the pages of history. The September 1993 joint peace proposal from Hume and Adams was followed three months later by the Downing Street Declaration, which led to the cease-fire in September 1994 and, most recently, the release of the Joint Framework document creating a road map for further discussion. None of this, including the crucial attention paid to peace in Northern Ireland by President Clinton, would have been possible without John Hume's bold steps.

Throughout it all, John Hume has hewed to the principles that have guided his path for over three decades — that peace must be built on a foundation of respect for all. The challenge to those still standing on the sidelines of the peace process is to accept the fact of a diverse Ireland and to strive in good faith toward creating a society where everyone works together. "The real division in Ireland is not the line in the map that we call partition," says John Hume. "That line in the map simply institutionalized a division that has existed for centuries in the hearts and minds of the Irish people. That is where the real border in Ireland lies — in the hearts and minds of the people." When those borders finally come down and a new nation is created by hearts and minds reaching across the old divides, John Hume will surely be known as the architect of peace.