

Fianna Fáil Leader Micheál Martin TD for thedetail.tv

The idea that the Irish Government was in some way complicit in the formation and development of the Provisional IRA first came to national mainstream attention last September when the DUP sought an apology from the Irish Government in a debate at Stormont. I listened to many of the contributions made during that debate and it was clear that the pain and anger caused by the activities of the IRA is still raw and still real. I understand this anger. Indeed, I share it. But the position I took at the time and still believe is that if an apology is to mean anything, it must be genuine. It must be offered by those who hold moral responsibility for the actions involved. The death of almost 1,800 men, women and children at the hands of the IRA was a hideous crime against their neighbours, against their country and against the proud ambitions of Irish Republicanism. But it is not a crime for which the Irish Government has culpability.

The crisis in Northern Ireland had its origins in the failure of the Stormont Government of that time to properly address the legitimate concerns of the civil rights movement; preferring instead violent repression which created the breeding ground for the pointless and horrific violence which blighted the following 30 years.

All parties need to engage on this important issue and not allow a grotesquely inaccurate narrative about our shared history to develop and undermine the hard won trust and improved north-south relations of the last twenty years. It is a narrative which distorts the facts of an unprecedented crisis in Irish history and deliberately ignores the decades of concerted policy and action in the Republic of Ireland aimed at thwarting the subversive threat posed by violent republicanism and loyalism.

While there may be some who believe there is merit in presenting successive Irish Governments as facilitators for the horrific violence in Northern Ireland, it serves only a narrow and negative agenda and it is just not true.

Fianna Fáil's commitment to unleashing the potential of Northern Ireland and reconciling its people remains as strong today as it was when we first involved the Irish Government in the search for peace many years ago. We believe that the neglect of the peace process over recent years by both Irish and British Governments has been a contributory factor in the increasing sense of political drift in Belfast and we would urge both Governments to re-engage, show leadership and rekindle the sense of purpose and hope that underpinned the breakthroughs of Northern Ireland politics.