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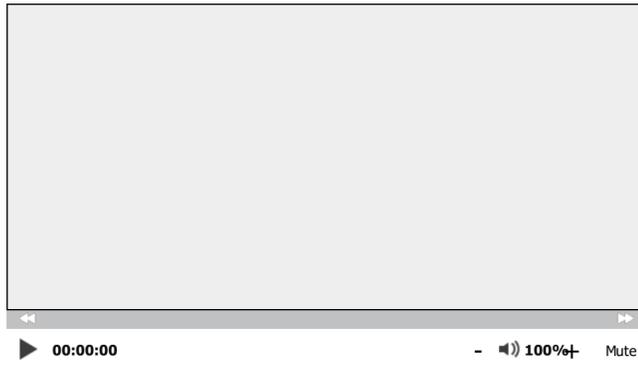
PM press conference with Taoiseach Leo Varadkar: 19 June 2017

From: [Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street](#) and [The Rt Hon Theresa May MP](#)

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Prime Minister Theresa May held a press conference with the Irish Taoiseach Leo Varadkar after talks at 10 Downing Street.



Prime Minister Theresa May

I would like to extend a warm welcome to Leo Varadkar to Downing Street today for the first time and offer my congratulations on his appointment as Taoiseach and leader of Fine Gael.

The unique relationship shared between the United Kingdom and Ireland is one of friendship, close cooperation and a deep sense of shared endeavour, bound by common values and generations of family links between our people.

The Taoiseach has said he believes in an Ireland where every person has an opportunity to succeed and share in prosperity. And I share a similar belief that the United Kingdom should be a place where everyone should have the chance to live a secure and happy life - a country that works for everyone, not just the privileged few.

We also spoke about the unimaginable tragedy which struck Grenfell Tower last week. The government will continue to do absolutely everything possible to help all of those affected through the difficult days, weeks, months and years ahead.

We spoke too about the appalling attack on Londoners in Finsbury in the early hours of this morning. As I said earlier, this was an attack that once again targeted the ordinary and the innocent going about their daily lives. Our thoughts and prayers are with the family and friends of the man who died and those who were injured.

The Taoiseach expressed his deepest sympathies for those affected by these horrific events and we both agreed that this kind of hatred and evil that leads to terrorism would never prevail.

Last week, the Taoiseach and I spoke and we agreed on the crucial need for the parties in Northern Ireland to form a fully functioning Executive by the 29 June deadline and how we would continue to engage closely on this important issue and reaffirmed that today.

We have both met the two main parties to make clear that the UK and Ireland would do everything we can to work with them and the importance of reaching an agreement by 29 June.

It is my firm belief that with good will on both sides a resolution can be reached which builds on the progress made in the last round of discussions. And my government remains absolutely committed to a successful outcome from these talks and we remain steadfast in our support for the Belfast Agreement and its successors.

As the United Kingdom embarks on leaving the European Union, I fully respect that Ireland will remain an EU member state and that's why it is more important than ever that the relationship between our countries continues to go from strength to strength.

We are leaving the European Union, but we are not leaving Europe – and we want to remain committed partners and allies of Ireland and all our friends across the continent.

Trade between our countries is worth over £43 billion a year and supports 400,000 jobs. And there are also complex supply chains that benefit both our countries. And as I've said before, no one wants to see this diminished. I am personally committed to ensuring a practical solution that recognises the unique economic, social, cultural and political context of the land border with Ireland - which so many people pass through everyday and it remain our priority to work closely with the Irish government to ensure a frictionless and seamless a border as possible.

And I made this clear in my letter to Donald Tusk triggering Article 50 and that we want to maintain the Common Travel Area between us to make sure the UK's withdrawal from the EU does not harm the Republic of Ireland. We also want the reciprocal rights that our citizens enjoy in both countries to continue, including the rights guaranteed under the Belfast Agreement.

And both we and the EU have made clear that we want to resolve this as a matter of priority and I am pleased that as negotiations begin in Brussels today we can start working in earnest together on joint solutions.

And it is with this shared sense of purpose that I believe our 2 countries can build even deeper ties and our unique relationship will become even closer and stronger.

The Taoiseach and I have had constructive discussions today. I look forward to working with him and to continuing the close relationship that our 2 countries have enjoyed for many more generations to come.

Taoiseach Leo Varadkar

Thank you. And first of all, Prime Minister, thank you very much for hosting us today here in 10 Downing Street. It's my first time in this building so there's a little thrill in it as well. It was – we spoke on the way in and I was reminded of that famous scene in Love Actually where Hugh Grant does his dance down the stairs. But apparently it wasn't actually filmed here so I didn't get a chance to see the stairs.

But it is my first visit overseas, and I really want to thank the Prime Minister for facilitating it at very short notice. But it does, I think, underline and emphasise the strength and closeness of the relationship that exists between our 2 countries.

At the meeting, I spoke again and offered the condolences on behalf of the Irish people and the Irish government to the British people and the British government on the enormous tragedies that this country and this city has faced in recent weeks.

We passed the Grenfell Tower on the way in today and saw the destruction that has occurred there, and even this morning, as you know, there's been another atrocity at Finsbury Park on top of what's happened at London Bridge.

And London is a very important city for Irish people. I think pretty much everyone in Ireland has somebody who lives here who's a relative of theirs or a close friend, and when there is an attack on London, we feel in Ireland that it's almost an attack on us as well.

And I just want you to know that you have our support and our solidarity, and if there's anything we can do to assist, we're ready and willing to do so. We spoke, of course, about renewing the bond of friendship that exists between our 2 countries. Relationships have been transformed in the past number of years and decades between the United Kingdom and Ireland. We want to enhance further those close bonds of friendship.

And I'm here in a very historical venue and had me thinking about history and the words of a very great British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, who said that our two countries should walk together in mutual comprehension and forgiveness.

And I think today as we step – take another step forward in tackling the great issues that face us today, facing Europe, facing Northern Ireland, and the British/Irish relationship, we go one step further, and we walk together in mutual comprehension and understanding, united in our shared ambition to find the best possible solutions to all of the many challenges that face us. We spoke of course about Northern Ireland, about our shared desire that the Executive be re-established, that the Assembly be up and running.

It is what the people of Northern Ireland voted for; when they voted for the Good Friday Agreement, they voted for devolution, and that should be respected by allowing those institutions to be re-established and be up and running again.

And of course we think it's very important that Northern Ireland should have a unique voice at this very important time when we face into negotiations on Brexit. I think having an Executive up and running, an Executive that can speak for both communities in Northern Ireland, would be a big advantage for Northern Ireland and also for our two governments.

So we're committed to working together to assist, engage and encourage the different parties in Northern Ireland to come to an agreement before the deadline of 29th June. And we're confident that can be done and are very seized of our roles as co-guarantors of the Good Friday agreement and as actors that must be impartial as these talks go on and into the future.

And finally, we spoke in some detail about the United Kingdom and Brexit. We are – we remain of course saddened that the United Kingdom has decided to leave the European Union, but that is of course a decision for the United Kingdom which we fully respect.

But there are a number of things that we want to work on together where I think we have a common interest. We will negotiate as one of the 27 and negotiations are between the European Union and the United Kingdom.

But there are 2 things – among other things, but 2 particular things which we want to focus on from the Irish Government's point of view. The first is maintaining the reciprocity of civic rights that exist between Britain and Ireland.

It's called the Common Travel Area, but it's much more than that; it's the right of Irish citizens and British citizens to travel, live, work, study, reside, access healthcare, pensions and housing in each other's countries as though we were citizens of both.

And that is something that both countries want to retain. It's been there since independence and of course long before.

And as well, we want to make sure that there is minimal or no disruption to trade between our two countries, which the Prime Minister has outlined as being so important, both in terms of the value and volume of trade, but also all the jobs it supports.

And that's trade North and South, but it's also trade East and West, which is enormously important to both governments. And we want to ensure as much as is possible that while there may be a political border between our two countries, that there should not be an economic border, and that any border that does exist, should be invisible.

And we've committed to work on that and to affirm those common goals and work together to achieve the best outcome possible for all of our people.
Thank you.

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From:

[Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street](#)
[The Rt Hon Theresa May MP](#)

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