



***Belfast Area Partnerships host Senator George Mitchell  
Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> July 2005  
Farset International Hotel***

Sammy Douglas welcomed Senator Mitchell to Belfast on behalf of the Belfast Area Partnerships.

Senator Mitchell began by remarking how the Belfast Area Partnerships event today at Farset was similar to a homecoming for him as he recalled the very first day he arrived in Belfast. On that day he had met both Geraldine McAteer and Jackie Redpath and heard views from the 2 different communities they worked in and here he was meeting with them again today. (He remembered at the time thinking what a good US Senator Jackie Redpath would make due to his talent of talking!)

He was delighted to be given the opportunity by Queens University to retain links with Northern Ireland through the post of Chancellor and today he attended the graduation of about 400 students and wondered how many of them will achieve their full potential and what opportunities they will be presented with that will allow them to achieve success.

Senator Mitchell praised the Belfast Area Partnerships and said that the work of the BAPs and people engaged with them was essential to the future of society here. During his first visit to Belfast, Senator Mitchell recalled how Jackie and Geraldine had told him that the areas most hard hit by violence during the troubles were also the most hard hit by unemployment and that there would not be a sustainable peace unless all the people have opportunity and hope and now 11 years on the situation is better and development is taking place across Belfast. He said that the Belfast Area Partnerships fill a void in the process of development and their support is essential to support peace and gain sustainability. He recognised that in a free market development is uneven and varies due to geography and social context but regardless of these factors he stressed that careful planning and political will is needed so all can fulfil their potential and certain areas are not left to suffer.

He spoke of his commitment to Northern Ireland and that even though he is proud to be an American he feels a lot of emotion towards NI and visits voluntarily because he loves the people. He found that people everywhere have things in common, they want work that has meaning, and a safe and healthy environment and they want their kids to have a fair chance to succeed in life.

During the time Senator Mitchell was in Northern Ireland for the negotiations his son Andrew was born. Negotiations had been taking place for 1.5years



with little or no progress. He returned home to America just in time for the birth of his son. Senator Mitchell recalled how the same day his child was born, 16<sup>th</sup> October 1997, he made contact with people in Belfast and asked them to find out how many babies had been born in Belfast on the same day as his son,— there were 61. Senator Mitchell wondered who those babies were, who their parents were, what their situations were and he realised that those parents would want the same opportunities for their children as he did for his son and it was at that time that he decided he would return to Northern Ireland to continue negotiations.

He stressed that if there is to be durable peace and sustainable reconciliation there has to be economic growth and creation of jobs. People need work and to be given a chance to get ahead because hope and opportunity are the ingredients for success. He was also here today as a way of thanking the Partnerships for what they have contributed to this, he said this contribution by BAPs was as important as that of any political leader and one cannot succeed without the other.

He recalled President Franklin D. Roosevelt and said that the best social programme is a good job—there is no substitute for it. This is as true in Belfast as it was in 1933 America. He said that there is energy, productivity and good honest people here. This is a beautiful place where everyone should have a chance to succeed. There is not a better place on earth to live and raise a family as in Northern Ireland.

***A brief Question and Answer session took place:***

Ray Palmer from the Greater Shankill Partnership asked Senator Mitchell what role he felt sport could play in reconciliation and regeneration.

Senator Mitchell said that he didn't know enough about all sports to comment fully on that but that he felt sport was important to the progress of society.

John McCorry NBP asked if Senator Mitchell had any views on how to encourage the private sector to work with the Partnerships and to support job growth.

Senator Mitchell outlined how one of the first tasks he was assigned by President Clinton was to organise a conference on trade in Northern Ireland to encourage support with the beginning of the peace process. In any free market approach there must be mutual self interest of course there is a role for charity as well but there must be mutual self interest.

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Senator Mitchell concluded by explaining how emotional a moment it was when after two years of very difficult negotiations an agreement was reached in April 1998 and finally a level of promise was accomplished which realised a dream for him which had kept him going through these most difficult 2 years.

However when his son was 6 months old he decided that one day he would like to return to Northern Ireland with him and show him the people and the country and a new dream formed for him – that being to bring his son to the Assembly and sit in the visitors gallery at Stormont and listen to the debates of ordinary issues of society such as agriculture and fisheries and there will be no talk of war, no talk of peace because it is taken for granted. On that day George Mitchell says his dream will be fulfilled.

Geraldine McAteer thanked Senator Mitchell for his visit.