**Full Statement by the Church of Ireland Archbishops and Bishops Ahead of the G8 Summit**

The Archbishops and Bishops of the Church of Ireland wish to extend a very warm welcome to the leaders of the G8 nations and their officials as they meet in County Fermanagh.

It is our prayer that they will have a fruitful series of meetings and that many people may be blessed in the decisions that they make.

**The importance of the task**

We are fully aware that the problems which the G8 leaders face are complex and often deep seated, and we acknowledge with thankfulness and humility the work which all involved in government undertake for our well being. We acknowledge also with penitence that as believers we have often sidelined consideration of economic affairs as of little relevance to our vocation. This has led not only to apathy about economic debate, but also to a refusal to face up to our economic responsibilities as individuals.

From our perspective as religious leaders, the work of civil government is a holy task and a calling of the most sacred kind. The equitable management of economic affairs has the potential to bring many benefits to a de-moralised world. As a subject for academic study, economics was first considered as a branch of ethics – the right ordering of human relationships – and we earnestly hope that something of that spirit can re-invigorate national and international discussion of our fiscal and economic affairs.

**A faith perspective; the IF Campaign**

Speaking as people of faith we wish to emphasise our belief that there is a reality even greater than the realities of the State and the Market, and which stands over both; the reality of the personality of God. Just as God in ancient Israel took notice of the merchant who used unfair weights to gain advantage, so he still takes notice of questionable commercial practice and inequity in economic life today.

It was for this reason that, at its recent meeting in General Synod, the Church of Ireland passed a motion recognising the importance of taxation in developing countries both to provide financial resources to government and to enhance accountability between a State and its citizens.

The Synod also supported the call for a new international accounting standard requiring companies to report on profits made and taxes paid in every country where they operate.

It was also at the meeting of this year’s General Synod that the Church of Ireland expressed a very wholehearted support for the IF Campaign which proposes practical ways by which much greater equity in food availability can be achieved. It is an unequivocal good that fewer people should have to go to bed each night hungry. We would urge the leaders of the G8 to make this fundamental goal into a reality.

**Reporting the G8**

In the coming days Ireland will play host to an enormous number of journalists from all over the world, and as such we will come under intense, if brief and tangential, worldwide scrutiny. We wish to offer our welcome and prayers to all journalists and wish them well in the difficult task they perform. The demands of insightful reporting and making fair comment are very great as is the responsibility that goes with their vocation.

**The suffering of ordinary people**

Such demands come at a time when Ireland, North and South, is experiencing extraordinary difficulties. Ordinary people from both jurisdictions have felt the heavy weight of austerity economics, and are in desperate need of a positive vision to guide them into a secure future.

Although Northern Ireland remains a much more settled and stable society than it was prior to the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, it is not a significantly more integrated one. It is very far from clear how substantial progress can be made in this area, and again as a Church we must acknowledge our part in perpetuating the failure to define a common identity for the people of Northern Ireland.

However, it is beyond doubt that wholesome economic life (and especially useful investment) requires social stability, a regard for the rule of law, and good community relations. Much has been achieved in these areas in recent years and again it is our prayer that the fruits of this work will be clear for all our visitors to see.

In the Republic of Ireland perhaps the most widespread demoralising factor in the lives of ordinary people is a grave uncertainty over how mortgage arrears are to be dealt with. Regardless of what technical difficulties it may have involved, citizens can’t help but draw a contrast between the treatment of the Banking Sector compared to the treatment of its clients.

In the case of the banks heaven and earth were moved to secure survival, whereas clients have, by and large, been left to the operation of the market. We acknowledge that the Financial Sector (especially banking) is not the same as other commercial enterprises. It much more closely resembles a blood bank, providing a vital resource without which every other factor in economic and commercial life cannot function.

If that has been the basis for the special treatment which it has received, then a complementary emphasis on its special responsibilities is also needed. Such special responsibilities cannot be worked out without very open dialogue with both commercial and personal customers.

It is perhaps one of the strangest and saddest aspects of the world post 2008 that governments, especially governments of wealthy countries, have not promoted serious discussion of alternative economic models beyond those of a particular form of financial capitalism.

**Youth unemployment**

The levels of youth unemployment in wealthy countries is not only an economic disaster, it is also a moral tragedy. Useful work is a God-given means to develop both the good of society and the capacity of the individual. Not to have useful paid work is to be deprived of one of the means of developing great virtues.

It is through the world of work that most of us learn the habits of regularity, team working, application, balanced judgement, reliability and toleration. For millions of young people to be deprived of the opportunity to acquire and deepen these virtues, which are as necessary for economic development as much as personal well-being, is to store up enormous personal and societal problems for decades to come.

The pace of economic recovery is so slow that, unless some special measures are made to cater for this generation, they may well be doomed to spending the most creative and productive years of their lives in a sterile no man’s land of economic inactivity.

**The Police Service of Northern Ireland**

One group of people who most certainly are not underemployed at present are the PSNI, who have had to carry the substantial organisational burden of ensuring that the G8 passes off in peace and good order. That has been an enormous task for a relatively small police service, supplemented by officers from elsewhere. Aside from the ordinary policing difficulties which come with any substantial public event the PSNI are also accommodating constructive lobbying and protest groups who quite rightly wish to make their mark at an important gathering.

It is our hope and prayer that less constructive or downright disruptive groups will not create more difficulties than those which are already facing a hard worked Police Service.

We wish to support those involved in this Policing operation both by our prayers and by urging the practical cooperation and support from all who will be in County Fermanagh during the G8.