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Prime Minister Ahern commends to ending Irish claim on land

DUBLIN, Ireland (AP) — Foreseeing a future of permanent peace in Ireland, Prime Minister Bertie Ahern yesterday declared his state's "irrevocable" commitment to dropping its territorial claim on the British-linked north.

Ahern addressed lawmakers in Dublin hours before the British government was scheduled to formally transfer powers to a new Protestant-Catholic government for Northern Ireland.

"With the full political settlement now about to be implemented, we have the strongest possible basis for permanent peace in Ireland, such as has never before been experienced in our history," he said.

Ahern said the Irish Republic's 1937 constitution would be amended yesterday in keeping with the Good Friday peace accord of 1998.

The proposed change, overwhelmingly approved by Irish voters last year, drops the definition of

Northern Ireland as "part of the national territory" in favor of proclaiming hope the north's British Protestant majority might one day seek unification.

"All sides have had to take risks for peace," Ahern said. "This is the risk that we are taking."

"All sides have had to take risks for peace."

— Bertie Ahern
Prime minister of Ireland

Ireland's constitutional change had been on hold as a dispute between rival parties in Northern Ireland over Irish Republican Army disarmament held up the formation of a coalition cabinet for the province.

That 12-member cabinet formed Monday after Ulster Unionist leader

David Trimble dropped the tant party's demand for a meeting in advance.

It will receive powers to hold its first meeting today.

In London, Prime Minister Blair announced Queen Elizabeth II approved legislation to transfer powers to the new Northern government.

"There are going to be difficulties along the way, but one huge, giant step has been taken," Blair told the House of Commons.

Ahern said his government was "now irrevocable" and Belfast Cabinet collapsed after the Good Friday accord.

Ahern appealed to the British government to begin disarming as soon as possible, saying this was "a necessary contribution to the consolidation and democracy, and to the of trust."

Mandela named as mediator of Burundi peace talks

ARUSHA, Tanzania (AP) — African leaders yesterday named former South African President Nelson Mandela as the new mediator for talks aimed at ending Burundi's six-year civil war.

The leaders announced the appointment after a closed-door meeting in the northern Tanzanian town of Arusha. Mandela replaces former Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere, who died of leukemia in October.

Fighting between Burundian government forces and Hutu rebels has killed more than 200,000 people since 1993, when Tutsi paratroopers killed Burundi's first democratically elected president, a Hutu.

The rebels are seeking the ouster of President Pierre

Buyoya, a retired Tutsi military officer who led a bloodless coup in 1996.

The 81-year-old Mandela had shunned participation in the Burundi talks, saying last year that peace in the Middle East was his primary interest. He is more interested in solving a Middle East problem than an African one.

He now faces a formidable task. The talks began in June 1998, have made little headway and have escalated in recent months as the army's forced resettlement of more than 300,000 civilians into camps international human-rights groups have condemned as squalid and unsafe.

"There is no alternative to a negotiated settlement to the Burundi conflict," the statement released after the meeting said.



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