

HILLARY CLINTON URGES STORMONT LEADERS TO AGREE ON POLICING AND JUSTICE POWERS

United States secretary of state uses Northern Ireland visit to say that U.S investors want to see completion of devolution.

On the 12th October Hillary Clinton stated when interviewed by the press on television that the United States will not meddle in the policing row among Northern Ireland Politicians. She said the Obama administration wanted the transfer of policing and justice powers to the Northern Ireland assembly.

“The Obama administration and the United States are committed to helping you on your journey” she said, “but when it comes to the important issue of the devolution of policing and justice, that is a decision for the assembly to take.”

Hillary was due to address the assembly but first she had meetings with Peter Robinson and Martin Mc Guinness and as the many politicians and dignitaries gathered at the assembly in Stormont there was an air of anxiety, almost nervousness as we all waited for her arrival. Everyone was dressed in their Sunday best and the silence was only broken when Gerry Adams crossed the floor to speak to Ian Paisley senior. His exchange with Paisley senior was friendly and relaxed and it seemed to free up the assembly MLAs into a freedom of movement between the benches as Fred Cobain crossed the floor and chatted amicably with the SDLP and Sinn Fein MLAs.

Hillary arrived in the chamber at 11am; some of us had been there since 9.45am and the hour had been taken up with the MLAs showing signs of how they wile away their time.

MLAs studied their hands, their nails, stared into space, tapped the bench in front of them, did a drum roll, put on and took off their coats. Some preoccupied themselves as effectively as a group of teenagers in texting messages. At one stage Jeffrey Donaldson, Iris Robinson and Gregory Campbell sitting in a row, heads down, were all vigorously texting.

Ian Paisley og showed a little more expertise with his mobile phone and took photographs to record the occasion of the visit by Hillary Clinton. While his father looking fresher than he did in the days when he was First Minister, held three different yet simultaneous conversations with DUP MLAs.

Willie Hay, the speaker of the assembly, toured the gallery welcoming guests like Cardinal Brady and the new Chief Constable Matt Baggot and Hillary Clinton's entourage.

It was left to Hillary Clinton in her speech to recognize the important contribution that John Hume and Ian Paisley senior made to the peace process. Hume sat a few seats from me looking down at the chamber which he played a huge part in creating and which he played a part in.

Nigel Dodds gloomily occupied the seat beside his leader Peter Robinson who averted his eyes from those on the opposite bench which included Gerry Adams and Martin Mc Guinness. It had been a tough few weeks all round and some hurt lingers beyond the spoken word.

Hillary Clinton's much awaited arrival almost happened unnoticed as she quietly and unassumingly walked behind the speaker as he led her to her chair. She appeared to be a diminutive, almost shy figure, showing signs of fatigue after her arduous transatlantic journey

Her quick eye movements scanned the chamber and the gallery. Her few minutes rest a welcome break from the previous two hours meeting with DUP and Sinn Fein leaderships and it still was only 11am.

But you do not get to be US Secretary of State, former First Lady in the White house and a senator unless you have nerves of steel and these are qualities Hillary is renowned for.

She became animated in the few feet from her seat to the podium for a speech which she characterized as coming from a 'true friend' who knows the important and special relationship between Ireland and the US.

She brought good tidings from President Obama and made it clear that the US administration would @stand with you@ as the last leg of the journey towards peace was completed and by this she meant the transfer of police and justice powers to the executive.

Ancestral ties meant bringing peace was a 'point of national pride and personal meaning'.

But it was also about the economic progress.....the value of peace is not only the absence of violence it is also the presence of new opportunities for investment for jobs for education and health care....20,000 jobs created by US firms since the year of the ceasefire, 1994 and more promised.

Her departing gesture, a handshake with the seated Peter Robinson, then Martin Mc Guinness, then Willie Hay the speaker, completing the tri-angle of relations between the people of the US and the nationalists and unionist people of Ireland.

Councillor Angela Nelson.