



ENG

ARNAGA DECLARATION

Nearly seven years ago we came to Donostia-San Sebastian and issued the Aiete declaration because we believed there was a real opportunity to overcome the last armed confrontation in Europe.

At that time, we called upon all sides to commit to peaceful and democratic means, and to dialogue and negotiation, to resolve differences so that a just and lasting peace could be achieved in this region.

ETA responded to our call by issuing a declaration of definitive cessation of all armed activity. Since then, they have kept their word and there has been no violence. Last year they went further and proceeded with complete disarmament. We recognise and warmly welcome these historic steps.

Today we come to Arnaga Palace in Kanbo-Cambo-les-Bains to welcome the final declaration by the group. Yesterday ETA announced it has ceased to exist. This is a historic moment for the whole of Europe as it marks the end of the last armed group on the continent.

In the nearly seven years since the Aiete Declaration, there have been major advances in response to our call for peace in the Basque Country. There are of course things that we called for at Aiete that have not been done. We suggested further dialogue between the group and the Spanish Government, and that did not happen. But many other efforts for peace were made. Basque society, civic organisations, parties and institutions have played a role in moving peace forward. We also pay tribute to the efforts over many years of the people and governments of the Basque Country, Spain and France as well as the work done by many named and unnamed individuals and organisations who have worked tirelessly to achieve what has been achieved today.

Relevant issues remain to be addressed, including prisoners and those still on the run, as well as continuing steps to fully normalise daily life and politics in the region.

Most of all, a process of reconciliation lies ahead. In our experience in the conflicts in which we have been involved, this takes a long time. Deep wounds remain. Families and communities are still divided. Further efforts need to be made to recognise and assist all victims. It will take honesty about the past from all sides, and generosity of spirit, to heal the wounds and rebuild a shared community. We welcome ETA's recent statement recognising the suffering it had inflicted and supporting the work of reconciliation that lies ahead. More work remains to be done on all sides. We trust that the work of reconciliation in the Basque Country will succeed and we stand ready to contribute should this be requested.



As we said in Aiete in 2011, we believe that building peace requires political dialogue among all the key actors. To resort to security measures and prison alone rarely proves successful. Peace is not a zero-sum game, but a matter of political consent where both sides agree to pursue their aims peacefully, politically and democratically.

Today is a good day for the people in the Basque Country, in Spain, in France and in Europe as a whole, a day to celebrate. We hope that sooner rather than later, with the efforts of everybody, a comprehensive, just and lasting solution will be reached in the Basque Country. We hope it also brings hope to those facing apparently insoluble conflicts elsewhere in the world.