

Official statement by the Lehendakari on the ETA ceasefire

Lehendakari Juan José Ibarretxe issued an official declaration on behalf of the Basque Government in response to the ceasefire declared by ETA. In it he underscored his satisfaction at the fact that ETA has finally paid attention to Basque society. He also expressed his hope for the future, reaffirmed his responsibility as Lehendakari and

emphasized his unwavering commitment to using purely political and democratic means to solve the conflict. He also appealed to all of the political parties and ideologies in Basque society to consider the process of peace and political normalization as their own in order to achieve a definitive reconciliation.

We are very satisfied that ETA has finally listened to Basque society. "As Lehendakari and in the name of the Basque Government, I want to express the excitement felt by Basque society by the ETA permanent ceasefire." These were the opening words of Juan José Ibarretxe's March 22nd declaration on behalf of the Basque Cabinet of Ministers in response to the news of the ceasefire declared by ETA.

"Basque society," he went on to say "calls for the complete and definitive cessation of all forms of violence and firmly demands the respect of human rights and freedoms for all people. Accordingly, it is ETA's obligation never again to frustrate the hopes of our people, and it is everyone's obligation, political parties and institutions alike, to create a universal and irreversible peace.

Ibarretxe said that the permanent ceasefire declaration by ETA "opens a window of hope that nothing and nobody should close" and that it calls for everyone to work together "to open a definitive peace process based on a negotiated end to the violence until which time it has completely disappeared. We must all be able to sincerely acknowledge all of the victims in lay the foundations for reconciliation in Basque society." The Lehendakari said that he had offered the Spanish Primer Minister, José Luís Rodríguez Zapatero, his and his government's total disposition in helping pave the way for the peace process. "I have voiced my commitment to support a loyal and sincere dialogue on the political issues linked to the Normalization Process."

He also expressed his unwavering commitment to finding political and democratic solutions to the conflict "based on the political nature of Euskal Herria today, and with the utmost respect for the fundamental principle of democracy: that political matters must be resolved by the legitimately chosen representatives of the people." He made public appeal to all of the political forces and groups in Basque society and announced the beginning of contacts with representatives from all of the Basque political parties to evaluate the new optimistic scenario



Lehendakari Ibarretxe during his declaration.

and propose the start of a preliminary phase of dialogue without exclusions.

"Society must feel that it is part of the process of peace and political normalization," said the Lehendakari. "It cannot just shrug if off as 'a matter of politics'. All of the men and women who live and work here must take part in the process."

"What brought us where we are is the insistence of society," added Ibarretxe. "Society opened the door to hope and it will be Basque society that will keep us from turning back; society will demand that agreements be reached, and demand that we move forward, participate and decide."

The Lehendakari concluded by saying "It's time to silence arms once and for all, to create a universal and irreversible peace. It's time to define the basis for the reconciliation of Basque society. It's time to work to reach a normalization agreement. It's time for Basque society to freely decide its own future in peace."