Brief chronology of the peace process from 1997

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May 1997</td>
<td>Tony Blair is elected as British Prime Minister.</td>
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<td>July 1997</td>
<td>Provisional IRA (PIRA) announces a renewal of its ceasefire after the British Government resumes contacts with Sinn Fein.</td>
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<td>August 1997</td>
<td>Independent International Commission on Decommissioning (IICD) is established to oversee decommissioning of paramilitary weapons.</td>
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<td>September 1997</td>
<td>Unionists, including the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), boycott talks because of the decision to allow Sinn Fein re-entry to talks. Sinn Fein sign up to the Mitchell Principles.</td>
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<td>October 1997</td>
<td>Gerry Adams meets Tony Blair.</td>
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<td>January 1998</td>
<td>Northern Ireland Secretary Mo Mowlam visits loyalist inmates in the Maze Prison to convince them to continue supporting the peace process.</td>
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<td>January 1998</td>
<td>Tony Blair announces the Bloody Sunday Inquiry.</td>
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<td>April 1998</td>
<td>The Good Friday Agreement is reached. The DUP opposes the Agreement.</td>
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<td>April 1998</td>
<td>The PIRA announces there will be no decommissioning.</td>
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<td>May 1998</td>
<td>‘Dissident’ republicans opposed to the Agreement and the Sinn Fein strategy form the Real IRA.</td>
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<td>May 1998</td>
<td>A referendum to gauge support for the Agreement produces a 71 per cent ‘for’ vote in Northern Ireland, although there is a large ‘no’ vote from unionism.</td>
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<td>June 1998</td>
<td>Elections to Northern Ireland Assembly lead to the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) and the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) being elected as the biggest parties.</td>
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<td>July 1998</td>
<td>Drumcree stand-off leads to widespread violence.</td>
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August 1998  Real IRA bombing in Omagh kills twenty-nine people, and two unborn twins.
September 1998  President Clinton visits Northern Ireland to try to bolster the peace process.
September 1998  Gerry Adams and UUP leader David Trimble lead first talks between unionists and republicans for seventy-five years.
September 1998  Early prisoner releases made possible by the Good Friday Agreement take place.
September 1998  Demolition of security installations and checkpoints takes place under the auspices of ‘confidence-building’ measures and demilitarisation.
October 1998  David Trimble and John Hume receive the Nobel Peace Prize.
February 1999  Disagreement between the parties over decommissioning continues to hamper power-sharing.
April 1999  Sinn Fein states that PIRA decommissioning cannot take place before the Assembly is up and running.
July 1999  Attempts to nominate Ministers for the Assembly fail as the UUP rejects Sinn Fein’s inability to deliver PIRA decommissioning.
September 1999  The Patten Report is released, recommending root-and-branch reform of policing. Recommendations include changes to the name, badges and symbols used by police and the setting up of a Policing Board which would be ‘community-led’. Patten also recommends a 50–50 recruitment of Catholics and Protestants to the police service.
November 1999  Sinn Fein agrees to talk with the IICD on decommissioning.
November 1999  Assembly meets and nominates Ministers as power-sharing commences.
February 2000  Northern Ireland Secretary Peter Mandelson suspends the Assembly because of no progress on decommissioning.
March 2000  Bloody Sunday Inquiry begins in Londonderry.
May 2000  The Provisional IRA announces it will open some arms dumps for inspection. This corresponds with a proposed sequence of events to facilitate a return to power-sharing but is also linked to a PIRA commitment to decommissioning weapons. Any PIRA action on weapons to run parallel with movement on policing reform and demilitarisation. For republicans this would create
the ‘context’ within which arms would be ‘completely and verifiably put beyond use’.

May 2000 Unionists agree a return to the Assembly, on the understanding that arms would be dealt with in parallel to the Assembly being up and running.

June 2000 The IICD confirm that they have inspected some PIRA arms dumps and that arms could not be removed without detection.

September 2000 ‘Dissidents’ attack MI6 headquarters in London.

March 2001 ‘Dissidents’ plant a car bomb outside the BBC in London.

May 2001 Slow progress on decommissioning leads to growing tensions within the UUP and David Trimble threatens to resign as First Minister one month after the forthcoming elections if decommissioning is not dealt with.

June 2001 The DUP, under leader the Rev. Ian Paisley, becomes the dominant unionist party at the elections and Sinn Fein supersede the SDLP to become the largest nationalist party.

July 2001 David Trimble stands down as leader of the UUP to create a six-week negotiating space.

August 2001 IICD announces that the PIRA has a plan to put arms ‘beyond use’.

August 2001 Assembly is suspended for twenty-four hours. The effect of this is to allow the parties another six weeks to agree who will be First Minister and Deputy First Minister (by 22 September 2001).

August 2001 Three men arrested in Columbia are accused of being in the PIRA and training Marxist rebels. The PIRA announces that it is withdrawing its plan to put weapons beyond use.

September 2001 Clashes and violence occur in Belfast between loyalists and republicans outside Holy Cross Girls’ primary school.

September 2001 Suspension of the Assembly because of slow progress leads to another hiatus of six weeks (until 3 November 2001) to give the parties more time to reach agreement and elect a First and Deputy First Minister.

October 2001 The IICD announces that it has witnessed a first act of PIRA decommissioning.

November 2001 Initial deadline of 3 November for election of First and Deputy First Minister passes, with Northern Ireland Secretary John Reid proposing 5 November as another deadline.
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November 2001  Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) renamed as Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI).

March 2002  Suspected PIRA involvement in break-in at Castlereagh police headquarters.

October 2002  Police raid Sinn Fein Stormont offices, suspecting the PIRA of running a spying operation, and search for evidence of republican intelligence gathering.

October 2002  Devolution is suspended and power-sharing collapses amidst allegations over continuing PIRA activity.

October 2002  Tony Blair makes a keynote speech on ‘acts of completion’ at Belfast Harbour, telling the PIRA it cannot be 'half in, half out' of the process.

April 2003  London and Dublin propose a way forward through the Joint Declaration document.

May 2003  The Joint Declaration is released. Assembly elections are postponed.

September 2003  Independent Monitoring Commission (IMC) is given the role of examining the dismantling of paramilitary structures and the transition to stable democratic institutions.

October 2003  Moves are initiated to choreograph a return to power-sharing based on positive verification of PIRA decommissioning. However, an IICD statement on a third act of PIRA decommissioning is seen as not sufficiently transparent by David Trimble and a return to power-sharing is postponed.

November 2003  DUP and Sinn Fein emerge from Assembly elections as dominant parties but Revd Ian Paisley refuses to sit in a government until the PIRA has disarmed.

March 2004  Substantive talks between the Irish and British Governments and the parties fail to bring about a breakthrough.

September 2004  Talks at Leeds Castle. Sinn Fein name two independent clergy witnesses who will verify decommissioning (Rev. Harold Good and Father Alec Reid). The DUP want visual proof of decommissioning, which is rejected by Sinn Fein.

December 2004  A record £26.5 million is stolen from the Northern Bank in Belfast. Security chiefs point towards the PIRA as responsible and believe the money to be a ‘retirement fund’ for PIRA personnel as well as used for election funding.
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January 2005  Robert McCartney is murdered by PIRA men outside a pub in Belfast. McCartney’s sisters launch a campaign for justice which leads to international pressure for the PIRA to be brought to an end.

February 2005  The PIRA withdraws an offer to complete the decommissioning of weapons.

March 2005  American pressure on the PIRA to disarm intensifies following the McCartney murder.

September 2005  The IICD announces that it is satisfied that the PIRA have decommissioned all arms.

January 2006  Proposed legislation to allow around 150 ‘on-the-run’ republican fugitives – accused of paramilitary crimes before 1998 – to return to Northern Ireland is widely rejected by the parties.

April 2006  Prime Minister Tony Blair and Taoiseach Bertie Ahern unveil blueprint for restoring devolution, confirming that the Assembly will be reformed on 15 May, with parties given six weeks to elect an Executive. A fall-back position is that if this fails a further twelve weeks will be given to get a multi-party government up and running or else salaries will be stopped.

May 2006  Assembly operates for the first time since its suspension in 2002.

June 2006  The two Governments restate 24 November as the last chance for devolution to be restored.

October 2006  The IMC announce that some of the PIRA’s most important structures have been dismantled.

October 2006  DUP leader Rev. Ian Paisley takes part in formal talks with Catholic Archbishop Sean Brady and deems conversations to be ‘helpful and constructive’.

October 2006  Three days of intensive multi-party talks designed to restore devolution take place at St Andrews in Scotland. May 2008 is called for as the deadline for the transfer of policing and justice affairs from London. St Andrews Agreement ratified.

December 2006  Sinn Fein Executive meets to discuss backing the police service.

January 2007  Sinn Fein members vote to support policing in Northern Ireland.

January 2007  Assembly elections are confirmed for 7 March and a transitional Assembly at Stormont is dissolved to allow this to take place.

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March 2007  Assembly elections return the DUP as the largest party with thirty-six seats, with Sinn Fein taking twenty-eight, the Ulster Unionists taking eighteen, the SDLP sixteen and the Alliance Party seven.

March 2007  Devolved government is restored in Northern Ireland after DUP and Sinn Fein leaders hold breakthrough meeting.

May 2007  The DUP’s Rev. Ian Paisley is sworn in as First Minister and Sinn Fein’s Martin McGuinness is sworn in as Deputy First Minister.

October 2007  The Executive agree a new legislative programme with an investment strategy for ten years.

April 2008  Peter Robinson succeeds Rev. Ian Paisley as leader of the DUP.

June 2008  Peter Robinson confirmed as First Minister.

July 2008  Slow progress on policing and justice bring the Assembly to a standstill.

November 2008  Executive meetings resumed after a DUP–Sinn Fein agreement is reached on the process for devolving authority for policing and justice.

March 2009  British soldiers and a policeman are killed by ‘dissident’ republicans. Both the DUP and Sinn Fein condemn the killings.

June 2009  Ulster Volunteer Force decommissions weapons.

December 2009  Legislation passed by the Assembly to pave the way for the transfer of policing and justice powers to Northern Ireland.

January 2010  British and Irish Governments meet Northern Ireland parties to finalise steps for the devolution of authority over policing and justice.

January 2010  Ulster Defence Association and Irish National Liberation Army decommission weapons.

February 2010  The IICD stands down.

February 2010  Ten days of negotiations lead to the Hillsborough Agreement, with Sinn Fein and the DUP finally agreeing a deal on the devolution of authority over policing and justice. The date of 12 April 2010 is set as the deadline for devolution.

March 2010  Assembly formally recognises the Hillsborough Agreement.

April 2010  Authority for policing and justice is devolved, with David Ford of the Alliance Party elected as Justice Minister.

April 2011  PSNI officer Ronan Kerr killed by ‘dissident’ republicans.

May 2011  Queen Elizabeth II makes state visit to Ireland.
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June 2012  Queen Elizabeth II on visit to Northern Ireland shakes hands with Sinn Fein’s Martin McGuinness.

July 2012  Extensive rioting in Ardoyne, Belfast following rival Protestant and Catholic parades.

November 2012  Prison officer David Black is killed by a ‘dissident’ republican group claiming to be the ‘new IRA’.

December 2012  Decision by Belfast City Council to change Union flag from flying permanently over Belfast City Hall to designated days sparks protests and riots by loyalists which continue throughout 2013.

July 2013  Formation of The Panel of Parties in the Northern Ireland Executive with Ambassador Richard Haass as Chair and Meghan L. O’Sullivan as Vice-Chair to initiate consensual recommendations on parades, protests, flags, symbols, emblems and related matters, and the past.

December 2013  Haass and O’Sullivan produce proposed agreement which is accepted by nationalists and republicans but rejected by unionists.

May 2014  Sinn Fein president Gerry Adams is arrested, questioned and detained for four days by police in Antrim, Northern Ireland over the abduction, murder and disappearance of Jean McConville in 1972 and for membership of the PIRA. He is released without charge.

September 2014  Rev. Ian Paisley, former leader of the DUP, dies.

October 2015  A report into the status of paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland produced by Lord Carlile, Rosalie Flanagan and Stephen Shaw concludes that all the main organisations remain in existence.

November 2015  Fresh Start Agreement is published to ‘consolidate the peace, secure stability, enable progress and offer hope’.

December 2015  Arlene Forster replaces Peter Robinson as leader of the DUP and becomes First Minister.


January 2017  Executive suspended.

January 2017  Michelle O’Neill of Sinn Fein named as Deputy First Minister.

March 2017  Martin McGuinness, Sinn Fein’s Deputy First Minster since 2007, dies.
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September 2017  The Independent Reporting Commission, established as part of the Fresh Start Agreement of 2015, is launched to report on progress towards ending paramilitary activity.

February 2018  Gerry Adams stands down as President of Sinn Fein and is replaced by Mary Lou McDonald.