

Praise for new Brooke initiative

THE Republic's Government has given its full backing to the Secretary of State, Mr Peter Brooke's last-ditch effort to get political talks underway involving the parties in Northern Ireland and the British and Irish governments.

Mr Brooke discussed his latest formula with the Republic's Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Gerry Collins, in London last Monday and the text of the confidential document was given to the Irish Government on Wednesday.

The Taoiseach, Mr Charles Haughey, conveyed his positive response directly to the British Prime Minister, Mr John Major.

In a statement, Mr Haughey said he had told Mr Major of his "full acceptance of the formula for substantive talks set out in the document" and expressed his "profound hope that the talks will now get under way and proceed to a successful conclusion."

The Fine Gael spokesman on Foreign Affairs, Mr Jim O'Keeffe, praised the painstaking efforts of the Secretary of State to find a positive basis for progress.

The Labour Party leader, Mr Dick Spring, said the question of when talks would begin had obviously reached a crucial stage and the parties in Northern Ireland should respond in a positive and open manner.

Parties pledge careful study of the proposals



Mr Brooke — time limit.



Mr Alderdice — welcome.



Mr Mallon — study.

NORTHERN Ireland's parties today promised full, constructive study of Mr Peter Brooke's document aimed at securing full political negotiations.

The Secretary of State, in moving on his 15-month 'talks about talks' process, laid out his own formula — confidential so far — and gave the parties and the Republic's government until Easter to respond.

Unionist leaders Mr Jim Molyneux and the Rev Ian Paisley planned no immediate reaction to his latest move.

Ulster Unionist MP Mr John Taylor said he was "delighted" that Mr Brooke had set a time limit because he felt people were losing confidence in politicians on the talks issue.

"We had thought we had an agreement on one last July, but at the last minute Dublin got out," he said, claiming that the same thing happened after the Unionist leaders met Mr Brooke on Christmas Eve.

"I think this problem can indeed be resolved and we can enter into proper talks."

Mr Taylor said the Unionists would still want to be part of a UK delegation in any talks that might be held with Dublin.

On Mr Charles Haughey's immediate welcome to Mr Brooke's announcement, the Strangford MP said the Taoiseach had twice rejected previous proposals.

Mr Taylor added: "We have always wanted talks. We believe talks are very important to involve the people of Northern Ireland in the administration of this state and bring about real co-operation with the Republic."

SDLP leader Mr John Hume is in America, but his deputy Mr Seamus Mallon commented: "We will study the document in great detail and give a considered response."

He said the talks about talks process had been going on too long, with people getting tired and feeling the process was losing credibility.

"It is good to be brought to a head one way or another," said Mr Mallon.

DUP spokesman Mr Nigel Dodds said: "We will study the document carefully before giving any response."

"Throughout the whole process, Unionists have adopted a positive attitude," said the former Lord Mayor. "We will be seeking to carry the process through if it is possible."

"We are glad Mr Brooke has finally put something down himself and that has brought it to a head."

Alliance leader Dr John Alderdice welcomed the move.

He said: "For some months I have been indicating that an agreement would not be reached among the parties on a basis for talks and Mr Brooke himself would have to set down on paper what he felt would be an appropriate basis."

"He has now done precisely this, though rather later than I would have hoped."

Workers Party chairman Mr Seamus Lynch was pleased Mr Brooke was to move his talks process forward and called on the politicians to respond positively.

Haughey accepts deadline for talks

IRISH premier Charles Haughey has signalled full acceptance of Ulster Secretary Peter Brooke's formula for inter-party talks in Northern Ireland.

In the Commons yesterday, Mr Brooke set a two-week deadline for acceptance of formal talks on the political future of the province.

He issued a confidential text setting out a basis for the talks to leaders of all constitutional parties and the Irish government on a "take it or leave it" basis.

Mr Haughey said he had conveyed his response to Mr Brooke's statement directly to Prime Minister John Major.

He told Mr Major of the Irish government's "profound hope that the talks will now get under way and proceed to a successful conclusion."

The parties involved in prolonged "talks about talks" over the past 14 months now have until Easter to accept or reject Mr Brooke's proposals.

The Commons announcement appeared to draw a favourable response from Unionists.

At a later news conference, Mr Brooke denied the draft formed an ultimatum, but said: "It is perfectly clear to me that unless everybody were to concur in the terms of the statement I have drafted and sent out then we would be drawing the line at this stage."

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