

20 May 1991

PRESS STATEMENT

The SDLP have accepted without reservation the Secretary of State's proposals of May 14th. We have also made clear that our clear understanding is that all talks would take place on the basis of the British Government's statement made by the Secretary of State in the House of Commons on March 26. That statement made clear that all discussions would be on all three relationships addressed in three strands of talks and that nothing would be agreed until everything was agreed. It also made clear that all parties would engage directly and actively in the North South talks.

Since the 14 May the unionist parties have put forward new pre-conditions relating to strand 2 as published in their version of the Downing Street meeting, - a version which the Secretary of State says he does not endorse. After lengthy discussions today, the Secretary of State put before us a joint unionist paper which again reiterates the matters that had to be agreed by them. They have offered to deal expeditiously with these outstanding issues on receipt of proposals put by the Secretary of State on these matters.

We have advised the Secretary of State to take advantage of this offer to deal expeditiously with these matters with the unionists so that the talks can begin with the minimum of delay. When he has done so the SDLP will be ready to begin the substantive talks immediately.

We share the public concern at the delays to date but we now hope that the Secretary of State can quickly resolve the outstanding issues which prevent the Unionist parties from accepting his May 14 statement.

Ends