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RECORD OF A PLENARY MEETING AT PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS ON THE AFTERNOON
OF 25 JUNE 1991

<u>Government Team</u>	<u>Alliance Party</u>	<u>DUP</u>
Secretary of State	Dr Alderdice	Dr Paisley
Minister of State	Mr Neeson	Mr McCrea
Mr Fell	Mr Dickson	Mr Robinson
Mr Pilling	Mr McBride	Mr McClure
Mr Thomas	Mrs Bell	Mr Wilson
Mr McNeill	Mr Morrow	Mr Campbell
<u>Talks Secretariat</u>	<u>SDLP</u>	<u>UUP</u>
Mr D J R Hill	Mr Hume	Mr Molyneaux
Mr Hallett	Mr Mallon	Mr Nicholson
	Mr McGrady	Mr Trimble
<u>Others present</u>	Mr Gallagher	Mr Allen
Mr Pawson	Mr Feely	Mr Empey
	Mr Farren	
	Mr Haughey	

The meeting began at 1420 and concluded at 1550. The Government Team said that despite some reports in the media, there was consistent evidence of a desire on the part of all the parties to continue doing business with a view to reaching agreement. The approach of circulating papers and then inviting questioning and clarification had served to identify a number of areas on which common ground could be developed. In order to facilitate this process, the Government Team had prepared a list of "general principles and perceived political realities and requirements" as a basis for discussion. Copies were circulated to the party delegations and the Government Team invited comments. [The list is attached].

2. The DUP said that before substantive discussion commenced they wished to record their view that the document was unbalanced in that it gave undue attention to the rights of the minority without taking due account of the rights of the majority. The Government Team commented that, while they took responsibility for any imbalance, their starting point had been the party position papers. Any points which had been omitted or given inadequate treatment could be dealt with in discussion.

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3. The Government Team suggested beginning with the question of constitutional status. It seemed clear from the party presentations that there was general acceptance of the position that Northern Ireland was part of the United Kingdom, that there would be no change in that status without the consent of a majority and that the present wish of a majority was for no change.
4. The UUP said that while they accepted what the Government Team had said regarding the status of Northern Ireland, it was necessary to take account of the fact that that status had been altered by the Anglo-Irish Agreement.
5. The DUP said that there should first of all be agreement on a clear definition of the status of Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom before there was any consideration of how that status might be changed. The DUP indicated that they had prepared a paper on this question, which they would circulate in due course.
6. The SDLP expressed concern at the proposal to begin discussion with the most controversial issue. It would be better to start with areas on which common ground could be more easily found. They accepted that Northern Ireland was a part of the United Kingdom but it was necessary to recognise that the problem was the result of existence of two identities and that this could not be resolved within the narrow ground of Northern Ireland. The Government Team commented that the document which had been circulated would enable such a discussion to take place.
7. The UUP proposed that discussion of item 11 in the document might be included in item 1. It was not appropriate to include discussions of relations with the UK Government and Parliament under the heading "external relationships".
8. The UUP reiterated, with DUP support that it was necessary for any discussions on the status of Northern Ireland to take account of the way in which that status had been changed as a result of the

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Anglo-Irish Agreement. In their view, the Anglo-Irish Agreement was fundamentally flawed because it did not define the status of Northern Ireland since the two Governments held different views as to what that status was. The United Kingdom Government regarded Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom, but the Republic of Ireland Government saw it as part of the national territory of Ireland as defined in Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution. The DUP made clear that they favoured a definition of the status of Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom without any qualification regarding a possible change in status. The UUP commented that it was puzzling that the question of a change in the status of Northern Ireland was constantly being raised. In other historical situations, where there had been a plebiscite on the allegiance of a particular territory, the question had been settled once and for all.

9. The DUP commented that the Anglo-Irish Agreement envisaged a change in status in one direction only. The people of Northern Ireland did not therefore have a full right of self-determination. It also envisaged that a change in status could occur on the basis of a simple majority which was nonsense.

10. The Government Team then turned to the nature of the Northern Ireland community, inviting views on whether there was a single, but divided, community or whether there were two distinct communities.

11. The UUP said that they preferred to think in terms of one community with two sides. There was too much in common between the two sides for them to be seen as separate communities.

12. The APNI felt strongly that the people of Northern Ireland did form a single community, but one which was deeply divided. There were however more than simply two identities. There were a number of categories within and between each identity and the boundaries between them were not watertight.

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13. The SDLP said that the question of whether there was one community or two was essentially a semantic issue. The fact was that the problem was caused by a conflict between two identities. It was necessary to devise structures, acceptable to both parts of the community, which gave expression to their distinct identities.

14. The UUP asked whether the Nationalist identity in Northern Ireland was a distinct community or whether it was a part of the wider Irish nation. The SDLP replied that their identity transcended the boundaries of Northern Ireland as did that of the Unionists.

15. The DUP said that the heart of the problem was that the Nationalist people had traditionally directed their loyalty towards the Southern Government and had not identified with the Government and institutions of Northern Ireland. Their ultimate aim was to achieve a united Ireland. The Unionists could not accept however that the minority had the right to demand the intervention of Dublin in the affairs of Northern Ireland. This was the fundamental flaw in the Anglo-Irish Agreement. If the objective was a united community, it was necessary that one side of that community was not encouraged to look to a separate Government to protect its interests. The answer was a devolved administration in which both sides of the community could deal together with the issues and problems of Northern Ireland. The UUP commented that in those circumstances the Government would find representatives of that devolved administration coming to them on behalf of the whole community for more funds etc.

16. The SDLP replied that before it was possible to identify solutions it was first necessary to reach agreement on the nature of the problem. Until this was done there was no basis for making progress. It was necessary to move away from the old approach to the problem based on territory to an approach based on finding unity between peoples.

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17. The DUP commented that the fears of the Protestant community about a united Ireland were deeply rooted in the experience of history. It was not just the Nationalist community which had been discriminated against. Protestants in the South had suffered, as shown by the decline in their numbers since independence. Fair Employment Agency statistics showed that in Nationalist controlled areas it was Protestants who were discriminated against.

18. The UUP said that the history of Western Europe contained many examples of the successful resolution of territorial disputes. They undertook to circulate a paper which analysed these cases.

19. The Government Team asked the SDLP whether the Irish identity which Nationalists held excluded any concept of "Britishness". The SDLP replied that their primary identity was Irish but this did not exclude affinities with the people of Great Britain.

20. The APNI said that it had been a fundamental mistake in history to attempt to solve the problem by drawing boundaries in one place or another. Doing so only created new minorities and led to instability. In their view it was best to address items 1 to 5 in the document on the basis of acceptance of the status quo.

21. The SDLP, returning to the question of whether there could be a British element in the Irish identity, suggested that in many respects Irish Nationalists identified more easily with the British way of life than did Northern Protestants. This was shown by the ease with which the Irish community in Britain had become assimilated. The UUP and DUP indicated dissent from this proposition.

22. At this point, the Government Team proposed adjournment for tea.

TALKS SECRETARIAT
25 June 1991

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