

1. The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the Rt Hon Peter Brooke, accompanied by the Minister of State, Dr Brian Mawhinney, today met the leaders of the four main constitutional political parties in Northern Ireland, the Rt Hon James Molyneaux MP, Mr John Hume MP MEP, Dr Ian Paisley MP MEP, and Dr John Alderdice.

2. Together they reviewed the outcome of the round of discussions which have taken place since last September in the search for agreement on a basis for fresh political talks. They reasserted their support for the concept of a new and more broadly based structure or agreement based on a re-examination of relationships within Northern Ireland, including relations between any new institutions there and the Westminster Parliament; relations within the island of Ireland; and relations between the two Governments. They acknowledged that much progress had been made in clearing away potential obstacles to fresh talks and that all the potential participants in the talks - the UK and Irish Governments and each of the four main parties - had been ready to adjust their original positions in a number of respects in order to facilitate progress. However, they concluded with regret that it was not possible in present circumstances to proceed to launch fresh substantive talks on the lines proposed.

3. They agreed that the various exchanges which had taken place over the past two years had been valuable in producing a basis for political dialogue which retained great potential and had yet to be fully exploited. They recalled the talks which took place between the parties in June and July last year and reaffirmed the view that these had produced genuine dialogue and provided a firm foundation

for further substantive exchanges in due course. They concluded that the more recent round of discussions had reaffirmed the existence of a generally acceptable basis for fresh talks and expressed the hope that this would be taken further ~~as soon as the present uncertainties were out of the way.~~ *at the appropriate time.*

4. Meanwhile, the party leaders agreed [that they would continue to meet regularly with the Secretary of State to discuss matters of general concern and] that delegates from each party should be briefed on various technical aspects of government in Northern Ireland to provide the parties with a clearer understanding of the present arrangements and assist them in developing proposals for alternative arrangements.