

STATEMENT MADE BY MR MURPHY, MINISTER OF STATE

Commenting on the debate that has arisen over the weekend following remarks by the Irish Foreign Minister, Mr Murphy said:

Brits are better at this than the Irish Govt at present

I know that anxieties have been expressed in Northern Ireland over the weekend about these remarks. Mr Andrews has made clear that he was misunderstood. He has emphasised that new North-South cooperation arrangements he had in mind would be subordinate and accountable in Northern Ireland to a devolved Assembly, and that they would operate by unanimity. They would not in any sense amount to the creation of any third source of power in Ireland.

I believe his clarification is very helpful. I do not think arrangements outside these criteria would be likely to gain the necessary support in the talks.

The requirement for support by representatives of a majority of each community is the fundamental safeguard. There will be no agreement without the support of a majority of unionists, and a majority of nationalists. And in addition to that, the agreement would need to gain support at a referendum in Northern Ireland.

Our concern in the talks is to promote agreement. As a government, it is also our responsibility to do all we can to safeguard the interests of each part of the community in Northern Ireland. Much has been said recently of Unionist interests being in danger in the talks process. That is not so. As the Prime Minister said in May, we would not be involved in negotiations that were threatening to unionists.