

DRAFT RECORD OF OPENING PLENARY SESSION - MONDAY 29 JULY 1996  
(18.47)

Those present:

Independent Chairmen	Government Teams	Parties
General de Chastelain	British Government	Alliance Party
Mr Holkeri	Irish Government	Labour Party
		Northern Ireland Women's Coalition
		Progressive Unionist Party
		Social Democratic and Labour Party
		Ulster Democratic party
		Ulster Democratic Unionist Party
		United Kingdom Unionist Party
		Ulster Unionist Party

1. The meeting commenced with the participants joining with the Chairman in expressing condolences to Senator Mitchell who had earlier left to attend the funeral of his brother in the USA.
2. The Chairman (Mr Holkeri) emphasised the achievements of the day's discussion. Some common ground had been established on the agenda issue, however differences remained, and it was not in his view possible to overcome these in the short time available before the summer break. He proposed that the Plenary should be adjourned until Monday 9 September on the basis that participants would, in the meantime, reflect upon the agenda issues. He invited comment upon this proposal.
3. The DUP drew attention to a document given to the press that morning which stated erroneously that the rules of procedure had been unanimously agreed. The DUP was concerned about both the

release and the misrepresentation of the document and about the criticism directed at the party by other participants during discussions on the grounds that it had been delaying proceedings. Those same critics were now supporting a very lengthy recess. The DUP said that the promise of the two Prime Ministers to address the decommissioning issue right at the beginning of the process seemed to have gone by the board. The DUP proposed that a committee be set up now to report on the issue. The Chairman expressed regret for the typing error in the document and reminded participants of the confidentiality of the discussions (Rule 16). The Alliance Party questioned why the hitherto proposed date of 3 September for resumption had now become 9 September. The Chairman said that this was at the request of most of the participants. The Alliance Party said that it was willing to continue working on the agenda.

4. The UKUP endorsed the DUP position and assured participants that there never had been any intent on its part to delay proceedings. The UKUP considered that decommissioning was the real issue and when the opportunity had now arrived to address important issues such as the status of Northern Ireland and decommissioning, some participants were looking for time-out. Those issues would have to be faced and would remain crucial to the pro-union participants.

5. The UUP said it welcomed this morning's decisions. About a week ago a shopping list had appeared in the press of issues to be resolved before the summer recess. The UUP had considered that public expectation had been unnecessarily and unwisely heightened and the Irish Government had been identified with this undue optimism. The UUP said it believed that the complicated agenda questions could not be addressed in a couple of days. There was a need for a period of reflection on the agenda. The UUP said it

would be available for any bilaterals on the issue during August and hoped that some progress could be made before 9 September.

6. The British Government said that, along with other participants, it shared a feeling of disappointment about progress and had hoped that more could have been achieved before the summer break. Participants had, however, worked hard during the discussions and a summer break was appropriate. The central questions affecting the agenda remained, and would have to be faced in September. They might be better and more fruitfully addressed then and the Chairman's proposal was therefore a reasonable one in the circumstances.

7. The UUP said it would now prefer to proceed with the agenda, feeling that the proposed break was inordinately long, especially in the context of present community instability, and the need to show the community that progress was being made at the talks. The UDP was also concerned that during the proposed break some parties might misinform the community as to where the talks had reached, and create false expectations.

8. The DUP noted that some other parties seemed to favour continuing the discussions. It also raised two requests with regard to participants receiving a record of meetings as provided by the rules and the distribution to all participants of proposals for the agenda made by the various participants. General de Chastelain confirmed that a draft record of formal meetings would be issued to the participants as soon as possible. The Chairman said he had received proposals for the agenda from three parties and these would be circulated to other participants if this was agreed by the parties concerned. He also invited those participants who had not submitted proposals to consider doing so.

9. The UUP said that the Government communique of 28 November 1995 had introduced the twin-track process as a way of making progress. In referring to paragraphs 34 and 38 of the International Body's Report the UUP now questioned whether one or more of the parties had retracted from the spirit of the earlier undertaking. It said it would welcome an indication of the continued commitment to the twin-track process from these participants. The UUP asked whether the two Governments had identified the technical experts needed, and in relation to paragraph 40, at what stage legislation had now reached. The UUP said it suspected that the two Governments were trying to sideline the decommissioning issue and were being assisted in this by other participants to the talks.

10. The Irish Government expressed satisfaction with progress to date and assured participants that both Governments were anxious to proceed with the agenda. The Irish Government rejected the inference of backtracking on the twin-track approach and considered that a great deal of careful thought had to go into the treatment of the agenda and decommissioning. It seemed however that participants could not reach conclusions on the agenda in the remaining 24 hours of the schedule and therefore a resumption on 9 September with opening statements was proposed. The UUP intervened to ask about progress with the creation of a verification committee. The Irish Government said that work on the legislative aspect was being advanced and that commitments given would be honoured.

11. The UUP pressed the point about the verification committee. The SDLP asked the Chairman if it was in order for participants to pose such questions to Government ministers. The DUP challenged

.. differentiations between Governments and other participants. The Chairman said that under rule 24 all remarks had to be addressed through the Chairman. In relation to specific questions, it was up to participants whether they wished to respond or not. He then reminded participants that they were presently discussing a proposal of the Chair.

12. The British Government said that the work of the two Governments on the matters in question was well advanced and assured the UUP that both Governments were taking the matter of decommissioning very seriously. They hoped however to benefit from consultation with other participants.

13. The UKUP said it believed the IRA had no intention of disarming and that there was no interest in disarming the IRA on the part of the Irish Government or the SDLP. The UKUP also stated it had no confidence in Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution nor confidence in the British Government's willingness to defend Northern Ireland from the IRA. There would be no softening of the views of the UKUP in these areas come September. The DUP challenged the Irish Government's proposal to resume in September with opening statements. In its view there would be no option but to begin with the with the sequence presently recommended by the two Governments. The DUP then proposed that the Chairman should ask each of the participants for their views on whether to adjourn or press on with the agenda.

14. The UKUP said that the whole question of linking decommissioning with the talks was flawed. It was nothing more than a lure to Sinn Fein. The issue of terrorist arms was for the rule of law and not a sort of bait. The DUP said that the British Government had indicated to it that the Irish Government wanted to

get into Strands One, Two and Three before addressing decommissioning. As long as terrorists had weapons in their hands the people of Ireland would be held to ransom. Decommissioning should proceed now but there was nothing but silence from the Irish Government at the legislative aspects. This was a matter for the two Governments, and not the political parties, to deal with as it was a law and order issue.

15. The Chairman reminded the participants that he had made a proposal, that the DUP had made a counter-proposal and that it was up to participants whether they continued this week or adjourned. The UUP said that they were willing to continue. The PUP said that the Chairman had given as a reason for adjournment the unlikelihood of agreement this week on the agenda issues. The PUP would support the Chairman's proposal in the circumstances, but suggested that each Monday and Tuesday in August should be set aside for bilaterals.

16. There being no further comment the Chairman asked for a vote of those in support of the DUP amendment to continue to work on the agenda issues. The DUP, UKUP and UDP supported the amendment. The Chairman declared that there was insufficient consensus for the proposal and called for a vote on his original proposal. Support for this came from the Alliance Party, Labour, PUP, SDLP, NI Women's Coalition and both Governments. The DUP enquired as to whether this did represent sufficient consensus. The Chairman then adjourned the session for 20 minutes to reflect on this point. Upon resumption he said he now proposed to employ the power vested in him by Rule 20 to adjourn the proceedings. The DUP and the UUP suggested that rather than exercising his authority under Rule 20, the Chairman should put the proposal to the participants again. The Chairman said that he would accept the suggestion but first

requested General de Chastelain to address the participants on the matter of proposals for the agenda.

17. General de Chastelain said that he had received proposals for the agenda from the DUP, SDLP and UKUP and inquired if other parties would be submitting proposals. The PUP, UDP, UUP and NI Women's Coalition said that they would submit proposals. The Alliance Party said that they had submitted a verbal proposal. General de Chastelain then inquired if participants wished the Chairman to circulate these proposals. The SDLP said it was not prepared to agree to the circulation of its proposals for the agenda until the Plenary discussions on agenda took place. The DUP said that if the participants were to make an attempt to progress the agenda before the proposed resumption in September it was surely desirable for the parties to exchange proposals. The UUP inquired if names should be put forward for the Business Committee. General de Chastelain said that he would be in touch with participants on this. The SDLP said that they would not be taking part in any meetings of the Business Committee before September.

18. The participants expressed thanks and appreciation to the Chairmen and all their staff for their services to the parties and Governments. The Chairman then proposed that the Plenary be adjourned until Monday 9 September. There were no objections. On behalf of the Chairmen and staff he thanked all of the participants for their kind words. He then adjourned the Plenary session until 9 September at 10.00. The session ended at 20.48.

Independent Chairmen Notetakers  
1 August 1996

OIC/PS3