

DRAFT SUMMARY RECORD OF OPENING PLENARY SESSION -
WEDNESDAY 2 OCTOBER 1996 (12.11)

Those present:

Independent Chairmen	Government Teams	Parties
Mr Holkeri	British Government	Alliance Party
General de Chastelain	Irish Government	Labour
		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 Chairman convened the meeting at 12.11. He reminded participants that the subject for discussion was the finalisation of the agenda for the remainder of the Opening Plenary session. The Chairman added that after Tuesday's adjournment, he had been informed that a series of bilateral talks were taking place on the basis of the British Government's revised proposal from the previous day. He believed it wise to allow these talks more time to continue through lunch. The Chairman said he would therefore call a further adjournment, but before doing so, the British Government had a separate issue to raise.

2. The British Government stated that an annual event would be taking place during week commencing 7 October which would result in Ministers being unavailable that week. Given the likelihood that the next subject for discussion in plenary would be decommissioning, and that it would be appropriate for Ministers to

lead on this, the debate on decommissioning might best be prepared for by moving into a bilateral phase on 7 October. The British Government apologised for this inconvenience but reiterated its view that a subject such as decommissioning required Ministers to be present. It therefore proposed that the plenary discussions on decommissioning be deferred until 14 October.

3. The Chairman asked participants for their agreement to this remarking that, in his view, plenary sessions could not work as effectively with Ministers absent. The DUP stated that it appreciated the British Government's difficulties. Both the DUP and the SDLP, however, also had difficulties in terms of European Parliament commitments. The DUP said it wished to see the discussion on decommissioning taking place on 14 October and not the week after. The 21 October was a European Parliament week and if overall attendance at this body slipped below 50%, the salaries of MEP staff were accordingly directly reduced.

4. The UUP acknowledged the British Government's position and agreed with its comments in relation to avoiding a plenary session on decommissioning when Ministers were not present. The British Government acknowledged the DUP's remarks and undertook to send a letter to the European authorities on behalf of those participants involved in both the talks process and that Parliament.

5. The UKUP pointed to the fact that as a small party, and with the start of Westminster business scheduled for 14 October, it might only be able to field one representative at the plenary that week. It therefore had a certain amount of reservation about the British Government's proposal. Furthermore no case had been made to have both Government Ministers away throughout the talks days

that week. It hoped, therefore, that the position of the minor parties would be taken into account by others.

6. The SDLP indicated its acceptance of the British Government's proposal. The DUP said that assumptions were being made that the issue of decommissioning would be reached in week commencing 7 October. What happened if discussions today on the agenda failed to reach agreement? It might be better not to rule out plenaries for the next week (7 October). The UDP agreed with the DUP view. Following further references to the deduction of expenses by the European Parliament involving the PUP, UKUP and DUP, the Chairman asked whether everyone was now clear on what was being proposed.

7. The UDP recalled the earlier DUP point about planning plenaries for week commencing 7 October. The British Government said that it was not asking for a blanket adjournment of the plenary. If a plenary was required that week on the issue of resolving the agenda, then officials would be available for this.

8. The SDLP, in referring to the Chairman's earlier remarks about adjourning the session, proposed that it reconvene at 15.30. The Chairman acknowledged this and referred to an earlier point that if no plenaries were required in week commencing 7 October, he would encourage bilaterals. The Independent Chairmen's staff would be present all week. The UUP asked whether, on the basis of holding bilaterals, a full complement of staff was actually needed. The Chairman indicated that it was likely that not all staff would be required that week. In response to a query from the DUP, the Chairman stated that there could yet be a plenary in week commencing 7 October but this was dependent on progress in

bilaterals. With this comment, the Chairman adjourned the session at 12.32 until 15.30.

Independent Chairmen Notetakers
3 October 1996

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