

DRAFT SUMMARY RECORD OF OPENING PLENARY SESSION -
TUESDAY 3 JUNE 1997 (14.10)

Those present:

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

1. The Chairman convened the meeting at 14.10 welcoming back everyone, including those recently returning from South Africa, to the process. The Chairman stated that when the final plenary of the previous session had broken up, it had been agreed that today's meeting would commence at 12.00 noon. The Chairman added that his office had received a request on 2 June to delay the start of the plenary by two hours to accommodate those participants returning from South Africa. Contact had been made with each party in the light of this request and no objections had been expressed. The Chairman said this was the reason for the meeting starting at 14.00.

2. The Chairman continued by referring to the customary practice of approval of the previous minutes. He said that since the previous meeting had taken place some three months earlier and had resulted in a lengthy set of minutes being produced, a suggestion might be to defer approval of this record until the first plenary meeting the following week, thus allowing participants time to study the record again. This was agreed. Moving on the Chairman

said that he believed it appropriate that since it had been three months since the last plenary meeting and much had occurred in the interim, the meeting should begin with each party presenting its current assessment of the situation, the possibilities of moving the process forward and any other comments relevant to the discussion.

3. On hearing no objections to this suggestion, the Chairman said that he would ask the two Governments to begin this commentary, followed by each of the parties on a tour de table basis. The Chairman reminded participants that prior to the break in March each had informally agreed that in such a discussion format, each party would be permitted to state its comments without interruption to enable a first pass to be completed. Following this round, the discussion would be opened up to allow questions and comments for the purposes of further clarification and elucidation. The Chairman then called on the British Government to open the discussion, at the same time welcoming, sincerely and enthusiastically, the new Secretary of State on her first attendance at the multi-party talks.

4. The Secretary of State, in her opening remarks, said it was a personal privilege to be present as the talks reconvened. She stated that she had followed the talks closely over the last year and welcomed the opportunity that was now available to be able to contribute to the process. In doing so, the Secretary of State paid tribute to her predecessors' own contributions to the talks. She said both the previous Secretary of State and Minister of State had devoted great effort and personal commitment to the search for a political settlement in Northern Ireland. The Secretary of State said that she believed there was now the chance to re-start negotiations with fresh impetus and a renewed sense of purpose and

determination. As long as everyone had the necessary vision and courage, the way was open to overcome the obstacles and make real progress towards the main objectives. The Secretary of State continued saying that she wished to acknowledge the work of the participants thus far as well as recognising that all had had to endure many frustrations in pursuing their different goals. In closing her personal remarks, the Secretary of State said that she wished to thank everyone in the room who had offered good wishes to her in both health and political terms. She said that she knew the honeymoon wouldn't last long and that there would be many criticisms but she hoped these would be directed at her and not at her officials who couldn't answer back.

5. The British Government said that its overriding objective was to reach a comprehensive, lasting political settlement which had the broad support of all parts of the community in Northern Ireland. The Prime Minister had already made clear his own personal commitment to achieving this objective. The British Government was determined to do all it could to work with others to the same end. Continuing, the British Government said that any outcome of the talks must be comprehensive and widely acceptable. It stood by the commitments to the triple lock mechanism, whereby any settlement would need to be agreed by the participants in the talks, approved in a referendum in Northern Ireland and finally endorsed by Parliament through the enactment of the relevant legislation. The British Government said it appreciated and shared the deep frustration felt by many that progress since last June had not been as great as many would have hoped, and that it had not yet proved possible to address the political issues which lay at the heart of the process. But some important progress had been made - and should not be underestimated - in laying the foundations upon which everyone now has to build. The item currently requiring

resolution was the important and sensitive issue of decommissioning. Only once this had been resolved, to the satisfaction of the participants, could the talks proceed to endorse proposals for the agenda and launch the three strands of political negotiation.

6. The British Government said it did not underestimate the difficulty of resolving the issue of decommissioning but wanted to say two things about it. Firstly, the issue must be resolved soon. If the settlement train was to begin to move, everyone must reach an agreed position on decommissioning first. And if the talks did not move on to the substantive issues in the near future they would lose credibility and we would defer - and perhaps lose - the best opportunity for a generation of securing a widely acceptable political accommodation. The British Government said it wished to see the launch of the substantive political negotiations within a matter of weeks. Everyone wanted to see lasting political stability in Northern Ireland: the quickening pace of constitutional reform throughout the rest of the United Kingdom provided a positive context in which to make real progress; everyone had to pick up the necessary momentum now. Secondly, the British Government said it wished to underline the fact that it was determined to facilitate the necessary agreement on the issue of decommissioning. The participants had deeply held, conflicting views on the subject but it was confident that there was a basis on which agreement could be reached. It believed that both Governments and the other participants, with the assistance of the Chairman and his colleagues, could find a way through.

7. The British Government continued saying that it was its firm belief that the talks process begun last June offered the best chance of securing a political settlement addressing the concerns

of all participants. The talks should be all-inclusive. The British Government said it had made clear that it would like to see Sinn Féin joining the negotiations. But it had made it equally clear that it stood by the conditions for Sinn Féin's entry to the talks, agreed by the two Governments and laid down in statute. If Sinn Féin wanted to join the talks there must be an unequivocal restoration of the IRA cease-fire, demonstrated, as had been said many times before, in word and deed. This must be backed up by a clear commitment to democratic principles. The British Government said that, with this in mind, the Prime Minister has authorised exploratory meetings between officials and Sinn Féin. There had been two such meetings and, subject to events on the ground, there could be another. If there was a cease-fire, there would be no unnecessary delay in Sinn Féin taking their place at the table. But if the republican movement failed to grasp this opportunity, the talks process would proceed without Sinn Féin. The ball was in their court.

8. The British Government said everyone must not lose sight of the wider issues facing people in Northern Ireland. It wanted the talks to take place in a climate of peace and reconciliation. It abhorred the continuing terrorist violence, and in particular the tragic fact that four men had died in past weeks as a direct result of sectarianism and thuggery. It condemned unreservedly the brutal murders of Robert Hamill, Darren Bradshaw, Sean Brown and Gregory Taylor. It also wholeheartedly condemned the arson attacks on churches and halls and harassment of churchgoers attending their place of worship, such as the protest outside the Roman Catholic church at Harryville. There was no justification for such action. The British Government stated that it would do all it could to deal with terrorism from whatever source. It fully shared the concern expressed by many about recent terrorist attacks that had been

attributed to loyalist extremists and about the recent emergence and development of the Loyalist Volunteer Force. The cease-fire announcement by the so called Combined Loyalist Military Command was still formally in place and, as the Prime Minister had said, that signal of restraint - so far as it went - was welcome. But the words of any cease-fire declaration were meaningless unless reflected in deed on the ground.

9. The British Government stated that the total and absolute commitment to the six principles set out in paragraph 20 of the Report of the International Body was an absolute requirement for participation in the negotiations. If on a rounded political judgement it felt that any party present had demonstrably dishonoured its commitment to those principles, it would not hesitate to take the appropriate action. The British Government said it would continue to monitor the situation carefully. It again urged all those with particular influence on the loyalist community to redouble their efforts in urging restraint. Those who held positions of influence, whether in Government or as representatives of political parties, had a duty to use that influence responsibly and to set an example to those whose words and actions threatened progress towards peace and political stability. The British Government said that in particular, as everyone entered this potentially difficult marching period over the summer months, a spirit of co-operation by all concerned must be encouraged.

10. The British Government said it wished to express its deepest gratitude to the Chairman, his colleagues and staff, for their continuing chairmanship of the talks. It was sure that it echoed the thoughts of all those around the table in expressing its appreciation for the time, effort and personal commitment all had

given to the process. The British Government said it was greatly reassured and relieved that the Chairman and staff were here for the resumption of the talks. In concluding its comments, the British Government said it would like to encourage all the participants to take the opportunity now presented to make real and early progress towards an honourable settlement. Everyone could be assured of the British Government's continuing commitment to work very closely with the Chairmen, the Irish Government and all the parties to achieve that aim.

11. The Irish Government began its remarks by welcoming the Chairman and his colleagues back to the process. It also warmly welcomed the new Secretary of State and Minister of State and looked forward to working with them during the coming months. The Irish Government said that its delegation differed from the rest of the delegations present in that it had not yet, during the past few weeks, gone through an election. This deficiency was shortly to be remedied. No election result was entirely predictable, especially in an electoral system as complex and finely balanced as the Republic's, but the Irish Government wished to assure all those around the table, who might be worried about the outcome producing the wrong result, that it looked forward to meeting everyone again shortly, refreshed in mandate as well as in body and spirit.

12. The Irish Government said that the inevitable polemics of any election campaign should not obscure the extent and solidity of the inter-party consensus on Northern Ireland which existed in its jurisdiction. There were minor differences of tone and emphasis between the parties in the Republic, and occasional divergence on detail. But across all the significant parties in the Republic there was a shared view of the key principles and broad outline of a settlement, and of how such a settlement should be achieved.

That view derived from something deeper than party policy. It reflected the strong desire of the population in general for a just and lasting, and above all a peaceful, resolution of this conflict. The Irish Government said it was confident, therefore, that any Government in the Republic would pursue broadly the same line as it had done, and would not substantially dissent from the views it had expressed and would continue to express.

13. The Irish Government continued saying that, in these negotiations, everyone was fast approaching a defining moment. How everyone collectively confronted the choice ahead would have enduring consequences, not just for the present process, but for the very concepts of political negotiation and of an agreed political settlement. And if all proved themselves unable, as democratic representatives, to reach agreement, they would be failing in their duty to show that there was an alternative to a never-ending cycle of violence and sectarianism. A society, or a political system, which could not accommodate difference and could not peacefully resolve disagreement would not develop and grow. The Irish Government said that nobody would deny the depths of tension, bitterness and anger which existed in Northern Ireland, and which could explode into shocking violence. The Irish Government said it echoed completely the sentiments expressed by the British Government in reference to the four recent murders and the continuing events at Harryville. It said that the ghastly murder of Constable Taylor symbolised the thinness of the crust upon which the negotiations were being conducted. It was of course too simplistic to draw a direct line between the process's inability up to now to make political progress and appalling events of this sort irrespective from whatever side of the political divide this was viewed. But the success or failure would, at the very least, profoundly affect the psychological climate, for good

or ill. The stakes were too high for any shirking of responsibilities.

14. The Irish Government said that, put simply, everyone must find a way of doing better than before the adjournment on 5 March. It said that the respective publics saw, in the failure to advance into negotiations on the core political questions which everyone was committed to discuss, a deeply disillusioning spectacle. Opinion surveys had shown little interest in, and indeed few expectations of, the work. This despite the fact that there were many potential assets at hand, if everyone was willing to use them, including great international goodwill, symbolised and expressed in the persons of the three Independent Chairmen. There was, in the carefully crafted structures of negotiation and rules of procedure, a set of arrangements which were fair to every party and which should allow for comprehensive discussion. Many, indeed most, parties might dislike some aspect or other of their organisation and structure, or find them cumbersome - although both the ground rules and the rules of procedure allowed for considerable flexibility and even potential efficiency in how everyone agreed to organise the business. But it would be in vain to believe that the fundamental issues facing everyone would go away, or that they would ever be other than difficult to resolve. Resolve, imagination, and mutual trust were the essential ingredients of any deal, and mattered much more than particular systems or rules, useful though those might be.

15. The Irish Government said that the issues everyone was committed to discuss were profoundly important. Differences in many respects on how they should be resolved were apparent. But that made genuine debate and negotiation between the participants more, not less, imperative. Moreover, the Irish Government stated

that the gaps between participants were not unbridgeable - and, indeed, on many matters, despite the levels of misunderstanding and bitterness which existed so visibly, nationalists and unionists were not further apart, but closer together than they were some years ago, in terms of their analysis and expectations of the principles and the parameters of a settlement. This placed a heavy onus on everyone who took justifiable pride in their commitment to democratic politics to find a way ahead. Politics was not about glorifying or reinforcing differences, but about resolving them. The process could not, therefore, go on as it had done. The Irish Government said that that would be a betrayal of its obligations to the people of Ireland and above all of Northern Ireland, who had suffered so much and who wanted something better. The Irish Government said it hesitated to quote from the South African experience, given that so many of the participants were there recently. But the words of Cyril Ramaphosa in Belfast last year struck true: "The challenge to all parties is to capture the moment, to have that desire, and to make sure that it gives the prospect of negotiations sufficient impetus to see to it that a solution is attainable".

16. The Irish Government said that if the process was successfully to move into real negotiations on questions of substance, then it must, finally, find a way of handling decommissioning to the satisfaction of all but without blocking the negotiations. It said it did not want to anticipate the more detailed discussions which must take place in the coming days or weeks on this issue. However, it wished to firmly place on record, once again, its firm and unshakeable resolve to achieve the complete disarmament of all paramilitary organisations. The Irish Government said it was absolutely committed to this goal, and knew that the parties all shared this objective - which was, after all, the second of the six

principles of democracy and non-violence to which everyone had explicitly committed themselves. The Republic's security forces had devoted great energy and resources over many years to hunting down such weapons and those who used them, with indeed considerable success. The only question was how, in practice, the decommissioning of those weapons and explosives which still remained beyond the reach of the security forces was to be achieved, and how those who held such weapons could be persuaded to renounce both the will to use the weapons, and the weapons themselves.

17. The Irish Government said it simply wished to ask all the parties to reflect calmly on this question, and to offer a realistic and reasonable response to it. It accepted that the decommissioning issue was of great symbolic importance, and that very symbolism might be counterproductive to achieving the actual goal itself. Moreover, the nature of the symbolism varied dramatically when viewed from different perspectives. It meant very different things to different people. The Irish Government said that the participants should not allow those clashing symbolisms to prevent everyone from dealing with the issue in a practical and constructive way. Still less should these be allowed to mesmerise everyone into a trance of inactivity and despair. Everyone must work towards the objective of decommissioning, as one would work towards any other important objective, with an eye to finding the path most likely to lead to that goal. Everyone must see the undoubted difficulties as challenges to be overcome, not as so many proofs of bad faith, or pretexts for obstruction. The decommissioning issue had to be resolved, but logically this could happen only voluntarily and on a basis of persuasion and compromise, not peremptorily.

18. The Irish Government said it continued to believe that it was through the implementation of the Report of the International Body in all its aspects that decommissioning would in fact be achieved. It guaranteed that it would spare no effort to ensure that this approach succeeded, once it had been agreed and endorsed by those at the negotiations. No action or inaction would be allowed to hamper the attainment of this objective. The Irish Government stated that it had already manifested its good faith through the placing on the statute book of the Decommissioning Act, 1997, and it stood ready to take such other necessary steps as might facilitate progress on this issue.

19. The Irish Government said that there was general acceptance that decommissioning would only be achieved through a fully inclusive process. It also continued to believe that such a process offered the best chance of success in reaching a lasting settlement - as indeed President Clinton had observed the previous week in London, and was indeed obvious from the facts of the case. The debate should not be about whether that was the best approach, but rather whether it could be implemented on the basis of the strict criteria set out by both Governments. The Irish Government said it wanted Sinn Féin to be a part of the process. They too say that they wanted to be. But the key to the gates was in their hands. Sinn Féin knew perfectly well what they had to do. The conditions for their entry had been rehearsed by both Governments on many occasions. There had to be an unequivocal restoration of the IRA cease-fire - and the sooner the better. Irish Government officials had in recent contacts, hammered home the message that the Government wanted a lasting cessation, and would not stand for any cynical and tactical manoeuvring between peace and democracy, on the one hand, and violence and coercion on the other. The ball was now very much in the republican movement's court.

20. The Irish Government said it would act in the only way which was compatible with their stated wish for genuine negotiation and the resolution of conflict by exclusively peaceful and democratic means. But the patience of the two Governments must not be presumed to be inexhaustible. The events of the last few days had raised further questions about the intentions of republicans and these were questions which could only be answered by an unequivocal restoration of the cease-fire and adherence to the Mitchell Principles. The Irish Government continued saying that it was clearly apparent that Sinn Féin represented a sizeable proportion of the Northern Ireland electorate. It was the third largest party in that jurisdiction. There were conflicting views as to why this was now so, or whether it was a good thing. But, irrespective of the answers to these questions, it became still more important that they be permitted and encouraged, on a basis of equality, to put forward their analysis and to work towards their aspirations in representing the views of their electorate. In so doing, as was the case in the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation, Sinn Féin like every other party, would have its views examined and robustly challenged.

21. The Irish Government said it stressed, however, that the last thing it wanted to see was any significant party absent from the talks table. Both technically, in function of the rule of sufficient consensus, and as a political essential, the negotiations needed both communities to be authoritatively represented. Subject only to the key criterion of democratic commitment, no party should seek to escape the need to engage with those whose views it did not share, and whose objectives might be unpalatable to it. No party could be allowed to determine whether any other could or could not participate. It was, of course,

essential that all parties fully honoured and adhered to their commitments to the six Mitchell Principles, which formed an essential element of these negotiations' terms of reference. The principles were not merely verbal formulae, but represented the only real basis on which democratic interaction was possible. Nor should their application be seen as constituting a mechanism for exclusion, but rather as a reinforcement of the common democratic purpose. The Irish Government said that, nevertheless, it believed that no sustained and deliberate departure from the principles was compatible with a good faith involvement in the search for political agreement. It was a matter of grave concern to it, and to opinion in the Republic, that loyalist violence raised questions about the continuing stability of the CLMC cease-fire.

22. The Irish Government said it recognised that certain acts may have been committed by groupings outside the CLMC umbrella, and acknowledged the genuine efforts made by the representatives of the two loyalist parties to stabilise this situation. It had seen at first hand the quality of the contribution being made by the PUP and the UDP, and recognised the recent enhancement of their democratic mandates. The Irish Government said both had a real and worthwhile role to play. But it was now important, as negotiations resumed, that ways were found to offer further reassurance that there was no ambiguity or uncertainty about their commitment to the Mitchell Principles, and that no future acts or words should threaten their place amongst the participants. Participation in negotiations, however, did not represent a reward or an end in itself, but a crucible in which ideas were tested. Whatever was unrealistic or unattainable in any party's position would evaporate in the fire of debate. Only through compromise could agreement be reached. That compromise must be firmly based on the principles put forward by the two Governments in the Joint Declaration, and

endorsed by the great majority of political parties on the island. The principle of consent offered the unionist community the certainty and security that there could be no change in the status of Northern Ireland without the consent of a majority of its people. Equally, however, both justice and stability would be served only by the creation of a radically new dispensation in which both communities felt an equal sense of ownership and belonging and where the principle of consent was seen to apply to both communities. The challenge facing everyone in these negotiations was not merely, or even largely, how to achieve their own objectives, but how to persuade others that their interests and aspirations had been adequately protected and expressed.

23. The Irish Government said that Belfast's new Lord Mayor, to whom it extended warmest congratulations, had said eloquently that the breaking of the political mould in his city was a bold step towards the creation of a partnership between the two political traditions - a partnership in which there was neither victory nor defeat but the triumph of tolerance. That partnership must be the objective not just for Belfast, but for Northern Ireland, for Ireland as a whole, and indeed for the two islands. It was now high time that everyone seriously began to confront the challenge. The prize of peace and agreement remained as glittering as it was last June. But the participants had to show greater urgency and ingenuity in finding ways in which the process could begin to approach it. The negotiations offered an opportunity which would not easily be reconstructed. The Irish Government said that it was now the time for everyone present to begin the work in earnest. Let everyone resolve to complete it together, in the interests of all the people we represent.

24. Alliance welcomed the Chairman and his two colleagues back to the process. The party said it was grateful for the interest and commitment which each was giving to the talks. The party said it also welcomed back its Irish Government colleagues as well as the new Secretaries of State and Minister of State. Alliance continued by saying that during the course of the talks process and the previous "talks about talks" it had worked closely with the three previous Secretary of State's who had carried out their duties with honour and distinction. It was a long hard trail for any Northern Ireland Secretary and Alliance said it hoped that the current postholder's tenure would be marked by success in the political development arena - something which had eluded previous incumbents. This was what everyone in Northern Ireland wished to see occurring.

25. Referring to the Irish Government's comments on South Africa, Alliance said that it had returned not all that encouraged from the visit, even though there were some similarities between Northern Ireland and the South Africa - the excellent weather and the media being locked out of the conference proceedings! Alliance said that it recalled comments being made about the resolution of the South African conflict in the context whereby key people were involved who wished to resolve the situation. In its view, there was no certainty about the commitment of some of the key people in Northern Ireland both inside and outside the current process to resolve the fundamental problems.

26. Alliance said that the previous talks process ended in mid 1992. The blueprint for resolution, focusing on three inter-relationships had now been on hold for almost 5 years in order that the position of undemocratic people outside the process could be addressed. Plenty of effort had gone into addressing this and much comment had been more recently aired about a "settlement train".

Again plenty of talk had been given over to when this train would "depart the station", but very little thought had so far gone into establishing whether or not the train would actually develop a head of steam to enable it to move. Alliance said it remained slightly reserved about whether much more would come from the process this time after waiting five years. With this in mind Alliance said it believed there was some merit in reviewing what progress had actually been achieved or the lack of it at this point before attempting to move the process forward. If one looked at the South African experience, great emphasis had been placed on the need for some kind of time frame to be established in which the conflict could be resolved. In Northern Ireland terms such a time frame was not just concerned with those who were outside the process and might come in but also a time frame should exist for the process to reach its destination. Alliance referred to the fact that a further twelve months was available for the lifetime of the present process. This appeared to be the limit to which all should be working to, for to go beyond this would only result in self deception and the deception of those in both communities. If this was the actual time frame, then it required respect from everyone. It also required the introduction of measured steps along the way to enable the process to reach its destination and the participants needed to apply themselves to this approach.

27. Alliance continued saying that it had been struck by the South African experience in regard to involving the community at large in helping to resolve the conflict. This wasn't simply restricted to the civil service but to the people at large. With this in mind Alliance said it believed consideration should be given to affording those in both communities the opportunity of listening or viewing plenary sessions. The party said it recognised that this had been ruled out initially as some might simply "grandstand" the

opportunity. But whether they did or did not didn't really matter either way. Alliance said that half way through the process, the availability of exposure should now be reviewed. Moving on, the party said that there was no point in kidding each other about the difficulty of resolving the fundamental problems in order to achieve progress. Of course, there was a new Lord Mayor in Belfast, but the result hadn't come about because of the working of the two traditions. This was why the process and the participants had to be realistic about the actual levels in which progress might be achieved.

28. The party said it had raised concerns in the past about the actions of loyalist paramilitaries. It said the process expected the republican movement to declare a cease-fire which had to be measured in word and deed to enable it to come into talks. The party said it now needed that same commitment from the CLMC because recently it had appeared that the CLMC cessation was operating only in word and not deed. Alliance said it believed this situation was worsening and it was therefore entirely proper to raise questions about it now. It was not a new issue. The party had raised similar questions last year and had gone along with the Governments' view at that time. However the party listened carefully to the British Government's comments earlier and was not satisfied with the present position.

29. The party said it wished to seek the advice of the Chair as to how this issue should be addressed. It said it also seriously questioned whether Sinn Féin wished to be at the talks. There appeared to be numerous pre-conditions being laid down, perhaps suggesting that it was easier for Sinn Féin to act the martyr outside as take bigger risks by coming in. Alliance referred again to its view of the South Africa experience where clearly people had

had to give in on certain fundamental positions. Was this really what Sinn Féin wished to be faced with, within the process? The Chairman asked whether Alliance wished him to respond to the earlier comment. Alliance indicated that it did.

30. The Chairman recalled that the subject of the loyalist ceasefire and the position of the loyalist parties had been discussed before. The Chairman reminded participants of the basis for the earlier review - ie rule 29, which he read aloud. The Chairman indicated that the process had previously interpreted "a formal representation" as a written document which in turn was circulated to others. On this occasion Alliance had made an oral representation. In view of this the Chairman said that he would suggest that his office attempt to organise a meeting, perhaps early the following week, inviting Alliance and the two loyalist parties to meet with the Chairmen in order to allow a full and frank discussion of the issues to take place between them. Following such a meeting Alliance could then decide on any further action which it wished to take. The Chairman emphasised that his suggestion did not foreclose any action being taken by other participants on the same issue.

31. Alliance said that if the two loyalist parties agreed to this suggestion, it would also be content. The party said that double standards must not be applied to those who were in the process. When one looked at the rules for people entering the process, there was a clear requirement for a cessation of violence in word and deed and this had again been referred to earlier by the British Government. If this occurred and a party gained entry, what about the criteria for removal from the process? Alliance said there was a different linkage being made in the rules between those who might be removed from the process and those coming in in the first place.

There was a dilemma here which should not go unnoticed. The UKUP raised a point of order querying whether the chair's ruling should not be subject of wider debate - as the issue of removal was of concern to all participants in the process. The UKUP said that it was unacceptable to adopt a position whereby one party could make or withdraw a charge about another party while the remainder of the participants were excluded from this process but had to deal with the ramifications of any decision.

32. The Chairman said that he had not given a ruling. He had only suggested a meeting and referred to rule 26 in this context. The Chairman said that he had also been careful to say that such a meeting would not foreclose on any future action by anyone else in the process. The Chairman said that what he was looking for was some form of action to trigger an assessment of the issue raised. Such a proposed meeting didn't exclude anyone else raising the issue and was only an effort to be responsive to the original query raised by Alliance. The UKUP said it agreed with the Chairman's remarks except to say that as the Chief Constable of the RUC had publicly stated, with all available intelligence, that the loyalist cease-fire had broken, did this not establish a prima facie case for the British Government, armed with the same intelligence, to take action against the loyalist parties? The Chairman said that he had the greatest of respect for the Chief Constable. However, he believed that the talks body needed to think very carefully about accepting the judgement of an official, irrespective of the seniority of his position, which triggered action against anyone or any party involved in the process. The Chairman suggested that the proposed meeting proceed.

33. Labour also welcomed back the Chairmen, staff, and greeted the new Secretary of State and Minister of State. The party also

wished the Tánaiste and the Minister for Justice all good wishes for Friday's election. Labour said the impression it had so far of the proceedings was that everyone was still on the same road as they had been for the last twelve months. The party said there were those who viewed the situation in Northern Ireland as insoluble. While in South Africa, Labour said that it listened to some Northern Ireland participants who appeared willing to contemplate the failure of the talks process. It said it would have to monitor this in future discussions. Labour said that despite what Alliance had said earlier, the party had found South Africa to be an incredible experience. The defining moment for the party was when President Mandela addressed both groups at the conference. The President had emphasised the importance of leadership but it was also down to individuals who had guts and determination as well as leadership. Labour said it was unfortunate that not everyone from the Northern Ireland political scene had been present in South Africa. The effort put in by the South African Government had been incredible.

34. The party said that those engaged in the talks process were going to have to do something important. At a basic level, mutual trust had to be developed before anything could be moved forward. This needed to be done now. Referring to the British Government's analogy of the "settlement train", Labour said the vital and important issue to establish was when was the train going to move. The process could not go on as before. It was up to the British Government to get the train moving. The process couldn't afford to have the train waiting indefinitely for Sinn Féin to board it. Labour said it also didn't believe Sinn Féin wanted to come in to the process. There had been plenty of past opportunities for them to do so but the process could not wait indefinitely. Returning to the theme of leadership, Labour asked about the leaders of the two

main parties. They had an important role to play in deciding whether or not a settlement was possible and could be achieved. A lot therefore depended on their guts and determination to achieve this above all else.

35. The NIWC welcomed back all three Chairmen and their respective secretariats. It also welcomed the new Secretary of State, the Minister of State, as well as the Tánaiste and Minister of Justice and wished them luck for the elections on Friday. The NIWC said it welcomed the re-commencement of the talks, and the continued commitment of the three distinguished Chairpersons. It hoped that the current weather outside would be reflected in the climate of the talks inside. If ever optimism was needed and a determination to make progress then it was now. The party said it believed that the recent Open Letter issued by the various employer organisations, and the Trade Unions threw down a gauntlet to all. They had, quite correctly, highlighted the fact that society in Northern Ireland was facing choices: real opportunities and real potential for peace, progress and prosperity; or more hostility, animosity and sectarianism if the right direction was not chosen.

Arguing from an economic base the CBI, the Hospitality Association, the Institute of Directors, the Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce, the Northern Ireland Committee of the ICTU, the Northern Ireland Economic Council and Northern Ireland Growth challenge had said that:-

"We all need to recognise that there can be no place for violence, or the threat of violence in our community. We must all act responsibly and consider the impact of our words and actions. We should encourage dialogue and discussion to

resolve differences whatever difficulties stand in the way of progress. We must build a better society based on consent".

36. The NIWC said that in essence that was what it hoped to be facilitating over the next few weeks - the potential to achieve peace, responsibility, dialogue and consensus options for progress. The alternative was to retreat into the apparent comfort zones of repetitive sloganising, epitomised by the negativity of 'Ulster Says No'. The ostrich style of politics may bring short-term political gains by feeding on fears and the 'slippery slope' thesis - but it also ran the risk of bringing long-term disaster, particularly to the link with Britain that a majority in Northern Ireland sought to maintain. While intransigence was by no means one-sided, there was a danger that unwavering intransigence would merely breed a sense of frustration in Britain, as well as a continued public representation of the unionist position as uncompromising and lacking a sense of vision for the future. The party said that if even Winston Churchill was less than enamoured by the re-emergence of the "dreary spires of Enniskillen" after World War I - and the party would take issue with him over Enniskillen - how much more likely was it that Britain in the 21st century would have little time for the constancy of Northern Ireland disputes? The NIWC said that what was needed now was leadership and a willingness to take calculated risks. The context set by the Prime Minister provided a clear and balanced framework for such leadership. It was clear that the union was not in doubt for the foreseeable future and certainly not while a majority of the people in Northern Ireland wished it to remain in place. But equally there was the crucial recognition that the region of Northern Ireland was not directly comparable to any other region of the United Kingdom, and consequently must come up with different options. Though while the union remained safe, arrangements must

be developed that would take due account of the dual identities that existed in Northern Ireland. This was also a challenge that required political leadership.

37. The NIWC said it believed that the necessary political leadership needed at this critical point in time entailed a number of essential elements: the ability to distinguish genuine threats to the union from manufactured and exaggerated threats; the ability to differentiate between political disagreement and sectarianism; the courage to recognise that we have to accept difference and develop structures to accommodate them rather than to adopt a policy of offensive assimilation; the confidence to recognise that possible new arrangements such as North/South institutions with clearly defined powers can be positive as well as negative; and the courage to publicly recognise that compromise and accommodation are the stuff of life and particularly political life.

38. The NIWC asked whether it was too much to ask those politicians with the biggest mandate to demonstrate a sense of political responsibility? Certainly if this could not be achieved then one could see Northern Ireland lagging behind Scotland and Wales in terms of devolution. The party said it was convinced that Stormont was abolished essentially because the leaders of unionism failed to even attempt to find any accommodation with nationalists. The question had to be posed as to whether everyone would continue to go around in these flat circles of fruitless intransigence? The party said that everyone should not be doomed to political rigor mortis or be bound to the politics of threat and innuendo. The choice and the power to take a different path were in everyone's own hands. The choice was to use the next few weeks to build defensive blockages, to stop talks, and prevent people entering talks, or to choose to start addressing real issues - the issues

contained in Strands 1, 2 and 3. It was within the discussion of those strands that the fuel and the energy to move the well quoted train of negotiation forward could be found.

39. The NIWC said that if the will or the imagination to move into genuine negotiations could not be found, then there was a danger of fulfilling the Sinn Féin argument that the talks were not worth anything without them. Having said this, it was the party's belief that Sinn Féin involvement in these discussions would bring an important dimension. The very idea of Sinn Féin's inclusion challenged the comfort zone of some parties to the extent that they would prefer to see the talks flounder on the unachievable objective of prior decommissioning. The NIWC said it was opposed to the wrecking of the talks from any quarter. The party was constantly asked what side it was on. It knew what side it was on; the side of genuine dialogue with a will to address options for everyone's future. This point brought us back to the essential element of negotiation that the employers and trade unions understood so well. Negotiation entailed putting forward realistic proposals acknowledging the need for compromise, and striving for the win-win outcome rather than a winner-takes-all scenario. Negotiation also involved an acceptance of the responsibility to make the compromise stick, and not heightening tension and then letting potential violence take its course. The party said that the penchant of issuing threats and then washing one's hands of the consequences or blaming them on the "bully boy" element was not the mark of genuine negotiators.

40. The party said that the other important mark of negotiation was a clarity about aim. The NIWC said it identified the aim of the talks as being about engaging in a peace-building exercise and seeking a range of options for this part of the world that would

bring about a society that could live in peace and have the confidence to respect the different aspirations and identifies that made everyone what they were. It therefore did not facilitate the peace-building process: to adopt purist approaches on who should be included in dialogue, whether here in these talks or locally over marches, over the pragmatic necessity of including as many political viewpoints as possible; to narrow the space for discussion by characterising all other political forces as the enemy, and by demonising them when ever possible; to allow the horror of the last atrocity to dictate the parameters of political dialogue; to mobilise fears and pressures to stymie political progress.

41. The NIWC said it believed that what was now required was an agreed clear aim from the current Peace Talks of a framework, arrangements and relationships for a peaceful, stable, inclusive and shared society - a society in which people could live free from fear of violence, intimidation and discrimination, could enjoy economic and social progress, and could hold their heads up high to the rest of the world. The party said everyone also needed the courage to name those who would put other priorities before this aim. Equally everyone needed to monitor the rhetoric and the actions of political representatives outside of the room to ensure that what they were saying was not at odds with the aim of peace-building. The party said that it might be accused of being idealistic, or being naive, or inexperienced in expressing these sentiments. Given the legacy of ineffective political developments over the last quarter of a century, the party was not particularly worried about not sharing in that experience. However it was convinced of the need to support a politics that will not condemn people in Northern Ireland, whether loyalist or republican, unionist or nationalist, to another quarter of a century of

violence. It was also the party's belief that while any minority should be prepared to compromise and to accept the principle of consent, the onus was on any majority to show leadership and to move the politics of Northern Ireland towards a politics of partnership both internally and externally. At this critical stage of Northern Ireland's political development the NIWC said that genuine leadership meant being prepared to take strategic risks for peace.

42. The PUP welcomed the Chairmen and staff as well as the Secretary of State and the Minister of State. The party referred to Alliance's earlier comments about loyalist violence and those of the UKUP in relation to a "prima facie" case. The party said it was minded to offer the words "indict or be damned" as a means of addressing the issue. However the Chairman's suggestion was a worthwhile one which the party supported. It also wished to extend an offer of bilaterals to any other participants who wished to seek clarification of the PUP's position. The party said that it had come to the talks process under a series of propositions. Everyone gathered in the room could set in train a set of political circumstances that could be the catalyst which would ultimately result in Northern Ireland society being at peace with itself and with its neighbours. A new beginning for the people of Northern Ireland, a new era of respect, of justice, of equality, of magnanimity, of opportunity and of tolerance. The party said that these propositions could become a reality if there was the political will to bring them to fruition and, if that were to be the case, the endeavours around the room would be highly spoken of by generations to come.

43. The party asked what was so fearful about change that it could not be faced with confidence in the knowledge that all were the

masters of change and that, together, all had the power to control and apply it as being desirable? Was everyone so insecure and immature as to permit the fear of change to become the master? The PUP said it was completely and utterly, without reservation, mental or otherwise, dedicated to achieving its political goals exclusively through peaceful and democratic methods and means. The party was part of an honourable, legitimate political philosophy, unashamedly pro-British and immovable on the union, as indeed, were some other parties present. However, there were those fellow-citizens also present, equally sincere, who thought in different terms and aspired to the peaceful fulfilment of their political aspirations. That too was honourable and legitimate and was equally entitled to be respected. The PUP said that the reality was however, that the greater number of people in Northern Ireland, in a variety of ways, had repeatedly and determinedly stated that the status of Northern Ireland, as an integral part of the United Kingdom, would not change because that was their political wish. So be it.

44. The party said that did not mean that everyone could not cooperate to encompass all citizens in a political circumstance where, as equals, they could peacefully agree to disagree and work together to enhance the quality of life for everyone. The party said there were those not present who would seek to thwart our aspiration in this regard. The party said that if they were outside the "door of reality" that was their decision but one should not permit that fact to retard political rapprochement and progress. The PUP said all true democracy was by the will of the people and the party trusted the people and would steadfastly abide by their wishes. The party said that each participant carried the prayers, the hopes and the good wishes of the ordinary people of Northern Ireland and it was they, and they alone who would have the

last say on any conclusions that may be reached. If the process was ever to reach any conclusions, the PUP said, everyone had better start soon to work towards this.

45. The SDLP welcomed the Chairmen and staff and thanked them for their patience and interest in attempting to resolve the problems facing participants. The party also welcomed the Secretary of State and Minister of State to their first plenary session. The party said that central to its approach of seeking political agreement had been the establishment of an inclusive all-party negotiating process based on an agenda which would address relationships within the North, between the North and South and between Ireland and Britain. The party therefore warmly welcomed the announcement by the British and Irish Governments on the 28 February 1996 of their firm intention to secure inclusive political negotiations "to address all relationships and issues in an interlocking three stranded process". The party also accepted, in full, the principle recommendations contained in the Report of the International Body chaired by Senator Mitchell and established "to provide an independent assessment of the decommissioning process".

46. The party said that despite its reservations about the elective process to precede the negotiation, it agreed to involve itself in the process and enter into the negotiations which commenced on June 10 1994. On the 30 of September last year, the party was on record as saying "that the political talks have most of the ingredients for success - save one. They lack the political will to make them work". The party said it was depressing that nearly a year later the process had not yet moved from item 2(b) on the agenda.

47. The SDLP said it was a source of considerable disappointment to it and to the whole nationalist community that when talks did convene they were not fully inclusive. When the present talks commenced it became clear that progress, while not exclusively a responsibility of the party and the UUP, was dependent to a not insignificant degree on both parties reaching an agreement which could be more widely endorsed. Yet instead of a willingness to create a basis for agreement, what had been witnessed had been a process of procrastination centred in the main around one single issue - decommissioning. The party said the decommissioning issue was so potent because it touched such a deadly serious issue - illegal weapons and the havoc they have wrought. The SDLP said that to question the decommissioning issue, or even the way it had been tactically manipulated, was to lay oneself open to attack as somehow making light of all human suffering due to these guns. The party said that, unlike many others on the island, it was founded on an active opposition to physical force. When the decommissioning issue was debated at the talks the party stated its position clearly. It stated that it was not those who brandished the potent symbolism of decommissioning who served the cause of anti-violence but rather those who tried to prevent it blocking the road to political progress. That road alone, said the party, would lead everyone, in the words of Senator Mitchell, "to decommission the mindsets" without which any physical decommissioning would be illusory.

48. The SDLP said that the process must not spend the next weeks or months rehearsing last year's debate. The Prime Minister's recent statement in Belfast offered a real opportunity for all involved in the political process in Northern Ireland. The opportunity for peace existed and all those inside and outside the talks should now seize it. The party said its position remained

simple and clear. It stood ready to join the two governments and all other willing parties to work to implement all aspects of the Mitchell report. The party said it believed the framework for agreement on the complex issue of decommissioning existed and that it had contributed more than should have been expected over the past year to try and reach agreement. The SDLP said it was firmly of the view that both governments, in co-operation with the independent chairmen, must take decisive action to ensure that the process did not become a victim of this single issue. They must, it believed, seek to move the agenda forward onto the real political issues which the talks were established to debate.

49. The UDP welcomed all those present and voiced hope that the DUP would soon return to the proceedings so that all could be present the following week. It said it shared the extreme concern expressed about the continuing IRA violence and other developing violence. The party said it saw it as the responsibility of everyone that no further violence occurred and the appropriate conditions could be created within the political process to ensure that violence was eliminated for good. The party said it was, and had always been, firmly committed to the Mitchell Principles. Its active opposition to the use of force to engage political change remained in place and the party would never walk away from its political responsibilities. The membership of the party had been engaged in addressing this very issue and in this light it wished to see the concerns of Alliance addressed. The party was quite prepared to go through this process again. It had been there before and was willing to explore the motivation lying behind the fears of parties who held these concerns even though such activity might deflect from the real aims of the overall process. The party said it was content to meet Alliance and deal with the issue

speedily. It was also content to speak to others in whatever format they so wished.

50. The UDP said it was also keen to get on and address the real issues of negotiation. The party wished to see a stable environment, an inclusive process and a restoration of the IRA cease-fire. The party said, however, that it was under no illusion that a restoration of the 1994 cease-fire would in fact be sufficient to provide a settlement. Other parties might walk away from the process without engaging Sinn Féin if they did come into the talks. The UDP said it believed it was up to Sinn Féin to convince others of their credibility and sincerity on this issue. As to the present process, the UDP said that everyone needed to concentrate their minds on resolving the agenda items speedily. Agreement needed to be reached on decommissioning before the summer break as it was vitally important for progress to be seen to be made in the eyes of the communities at large.

51. The UKUP echoed the words of welcome of the other parties. The party said it was a paradox that the UKUP shared with the other parties the objectives of peace, reconciliation and justice, the absence of discrimination and economic development to the benefit of all, whilst being in profound disagreement that the current peace process represented the most appropriate means of attaining those objectives.

52. The UKUP said the two Governments, and particularly the British Government, shared two objectives. The first was a commitment to resolution of the conflict between the British state and Sinn Féin/IRA. The party cited comments by Prime Minister Major, speaking after the Downing Street Declaration, when he said the only people who could deliver peace were the IRA. This, it

said, was why the British Government had engaged in secret talks with Sinn Féin in the lead up to the Downing Street Declaration. The UKUP said Mr Adams had made clear in March 1993 that Sinn Féin would negotiate with the British Government in return for a commitment to end partition. It said the British Government responded in the Downing Street Declaration with the statement that it had 'no strategic, economic or selfish interest' in Northern Ireland. It said this showed that the British Government would end partition tomorrow were it in its power to do so. Between December 1993 and August 1994 the British Government engaged in a process of clarification with Sinn Féin, resulting in an IRA cease-fire and the creation, in the form of the Framework Document, of a mechanism to produce Irish unity by instalments. The UKUP stated that the Downing Street Declaration and the Framework Document represented the best offer made by the two governments to Sinn Féin/IRA to bring about a cessation of violence. The party said the IRA resumed its campaign of violence in February 1996 when it became dissatisfied at the speed of political progress and the way in which decommissioning was being handled.

53. The UKUP said the second objective was to bring about a stable political agreement in Northern Ireland. The UKUP said these two objectives were incompatible. Steps taken in pursuit of the first objective were creating conditions of instability between the two communities in Northern Ireland which would frustrate attempts to secure the second objective. The party said that the more concessions the previous British Government made to Sinn Féin, the more paranoid the unionist community became. It said that, prior to December 1993, only a small minority of both communities in Northern Ireland supported terrorism; the vast majority of the population had opposed it. Since then, the UKUP said the peace process had failed to deliver peace. Punishment beatings had

increased by 400%, terrorist activity had continued and the two communities were now more divided than ever before. There was, it said, an impression among the public that the Government was not taking adequate steps to counter this, especially during the IRA cease-fire. It cited the Community Relations Committee to the effect that community relations were now worse than ever, and attributed the civil unrest at Harryville and Garvaghy Road to the peace process. These were the consequences of the previous Government's policy towards the peace process. The pro-Union community would have to wait and see whether the new Labour administration would pursue a similar policy.

54. The UKUP continued, saying Government policy was being dictated by officials and followed by politicians who had no roots in Northern Ireland. It said this policy was supported by the Irish Government and officials of the Anglo-Irish Secretariat who had no mandate in Northern Ireland. It drew attention to the fact that the Labour Party did not organise politically in Northern Ireland. It said that secret discussions between the two governments were contributing to the atmosphere of distrust and suspicion which the peace process was intended to dispel. The party referred to comments by the Secretary of State about opening up government, and called on her to open up what it called the biggest and most unaccountable quango in Northern Ireland. It also called on the Labour Government to return accountable government to Northern Ireland.

55. The UKUP said the British Government was engaged in a series of parallel talks with Sinn Féin. It asked why it had been necessary to hold two explanatory meetings to date at official level. It quoted comments by the Taoiseach in the "Belfast Telegraph" on 11 February 1997 that the conditions governing Sinn

Féin's entry to negotiations were clear, and welcomed comments to the same effect by the Tánaiste in the Irish Government's statement to the Plenary. The party said it believed the terms of Sinn Féin entry to negotiations, and the nature of an IRA cease-fire, were being discussed at these meetings. It continued that talks about the nature of a cease-fire would touch upon the question of decommissioning, an issue that is to be determined by the parties in the multi-party negotiations. The UKUP said the permanence of a cessation of violence had a direct bearing on decommissioning and the modalities of its implementation. It differentiated between a complete cease-fire, being a statement of kind, and a permanent cease-fire, being a statement of duration. The party said that any new cease-fire would have to hold and that, therefore, the republican movement would want to be assured beforehand about issues such as decommissioning.

56. The UKUP noted that the previous British Government stated on 30 October 1996 that, under legislation, there must be an unequivocal restoration of the cease-fire before Sinn Féin would be invited to nominate a negotiations team. It then observed that paragraph 10 of the Downing Street Declaration said there must first be a permanent cease-fire before Sinn Féin would be admitted to negotiations. The party said that the Conservative government had made the assumption that, after three months, the IRA cease-fire of August 1994 was permanent. It had instead proven to be merely a tactical cessation by the IRA. The relaxed security environment during the cease-fire had, it continued, ultimately benefited the IRA which, it said, continued targeting and training during this period. The UKUP said that an unequivocal cease-fire was not the same as an unequivocal restoration of the IRA cease-fire of August 1994. To admit Sinn Féin to negotiations on the basis of a restoration of that cease-fire illustrated that the

primary aim of the peace process was peace with the terrorists. The UKUP said that it was absurd to hold explanatory talks. If a cease-fire was to be permanent, there was no reason why the IRA should not hand over its weapons.

57. Because of the importance of the nature of a cease-fire to decommissioning, the UKUP called on the British Government to cease any further contact with Sinn Féin, and said it could not continue to attend meetings of the plenary while such parallel negotiations continued.

58. Moving on, the UKUP said that the British Government's triple lock guarantee that there would be no agreement imposed on the people of Northern Ireland was in reality a single lock. It said Parliament would be unlikely to reject a package which had first received the assent of the political parties and the Northern Ireland electorate in a referendum. The Northern Ireland electorate would be unlikely to reject at the polls a settlement which had been agreed among a majority of the main political parties. This left only the political parties as a check against an unsatisfactory settlement. The UKUP said that the pro-Union community would not regard this as reassuring.

59. On the issue of parades, the UKUP said the policy of securing local agreement to the routing of lawful and non-provocative marches was unwise and would not prove successful. It said that to submit the routing of parades to third party adjudication was undemocratic because such matters were properly a function of government. It said lawful and unprovocative parades should be allowed to proceed by the appropriate authority. To apply the principle of local consent generally would represent a concession

to violence, and would ultimately result in an increase in the number of contentious parades and the potential for confrontation.

60. The UKUP concluded by reaffirming its desire to secure a peaceful settlement, and restated its belief that the current process of negotiations was not the most appropriate means to that end.

61. The UUP repeated the greetings of the other parties. It noted that the Tánaiste and the Minister for Justice were no longer present in the room, and wondered whether this was indicative of the attitude of the Irish Government.

62. The Irish Government said that the commitment of the Irish Government to the negotiations had been illustrated by the fact that ministers had attended the plenary session three days before a general election. It explained that the ministers had commitments in Dublin that evening.

63. The UUP stated its concern at the recent violent attacks, and wished to be associated with the comments of the Secretary of State on this subject. The party said it was not optimistic that the gradual deterioration in the security situation would not continue in the coming weeks. It continued by voicing its concern at the parallel talks between British Government officials and Sinn Féin. It said the Prime Minister had outlined a clear and limited remit for these contacts during his recent visit to Belfast. It believed this explanatory remit had been exceeded after the first meeting, and said the continuation of contacts was a very serious matter. It believed the Prime Minister's assurances were being dishonoured, and Sinn Féin were probing the new British Government to see how

firm it was. The UUP shared the concerns voiced by other parties on this subject, and said the contacts with Sinn Féin must end.

64. The UUP said it endorsed the rest of the Prime Minister's Belfast speech. It said the most helpful part was his assurance that Sinn Féin would not be permitted to hold up the negotiations any longer. The UUP said there was no obligation on the other parties to persuade Sinn Féin to renounce the use of violence, as this would mean Sinn Féin would continue to exercise a veto over progress by refusing to renounce violence. The party said the Downing Street Declaration had provided an opportunity for Sinn Féin to enter the political process. It said this opportunity could not be there indefinitely, and said that the settlement train would have to leave without Sinn Féin if it did not accept democratic politics. It said the Prime Minister must demonstrate clearly that the settlement train was leaving and that those who did not join the political process would be left behind. Furthermore, the UUP said there was no point in such parties turning up at the platform after the train had left; the process must proceed without them.

65. The UUP noted the Secretary of State's statement that the British Government would facilitate any agreement on decommissioning. The party expressed doubts about a similar commitment made by the Irish Government. It said that it had asked Secretary of State Mayhew to proceed with recommendations on decommissioning schemes, and to establish an international verification committee. It said that it suggested that this verification committee should at least be informally appointed. The party said the former Secretary of State declined to take such action. The UUP said that its proposals of October 1996 requested clear assurances from the British Government on an interpretation

of any cease-fire, on the terms for Sinn Féin entry to negotiations and on the procedures that would apply in the negotiations should Sinn Féin secure admission. The party said it had received no answer to these requests. The UUP said it was important to establish where the new British Government stood on these issues, and hoped that details would soon be forthcoming.

66. In summation, the UUP called for the parties to move to a debate on the way forward. It suggested a stock-taking exercise under the guidance of the Chairmen over the next few days. The plenary would then proceed with a clearer view of the position of the different parties. It said the settlement train would then be able to get up steam and finally go somewhere.

67. Moving on, the Chairman invited participants to comment on the statements, or to direct any questions to the chair.

68. The UKUP said the most serious issue was that of parallel talks with Sinn Féin. The party asked what the Secretary of State meant when she said that any future meeting between officials and Sinn Féin would be determined by events on the ground. It asked whether a halt to IRA activity until the weekend would be sufficient to authorise a further meeting with Sinn Féin the following week. The Secretary of State's answer would, the UKUP said, be suggestive of the time frame under consideration by the British Government for the admission of Sinn Féin to negotiations following a restoration of the IRA cease-fire.

69. The UKUP also voiced concern at the expressions of welcome by the Tánaiste at the beginning of the Irish Government's statement to the plenary. It said the Irish Government had no directing role in the negotiations process, nor any mandate in Northern Ireland.

The party said that the Irish Government was an interested party in the talks like the other participants. It was a mark of the tolerance showed by the unionist parties that the Irish Government was allowed to participate in the negotiations, expressing doubt that the wider unionist population would be as tolerant. It then called on the Irish Government to take steps to remove articles 2 and 3 of the republic's constitution.

70. The Chairman explained the procedure governing questions to the Secretary of State.

71. The Secretary of State said the British Government was not engaged in a drawn out process of parallel dialogue, nor was it negotiating the terms of Sinn Féin entry to the talks. The Secretary of State said she hoped decommissioning would be resolved with the support of all the parties within a matter of weeks so that progress could be made towards the substantive agenda. No further meetings with Sinn Féin had been authorised this week, but the option for a meeting in future weeks had not been precluded. The Secretary of State said a judgement to call such a meeting would depend on events on the ground.

72. There being no further comments or questions, the Chairman proposed the following course of action: (a) participants engage in a stock-taking exercise to ascertain the position of the various participants on how to proceed with the important issues remaining on the agenda. Over the coming days the Chairmen would arrange bilateral meetings with each of the parties. They had already held brief meetings with the UKUP and the SDLP; (b) the meeting between the Alliance party and the loyalist parties take place the following week; (c) the plenary reconvene on Tuesday 10 June at 14.00.

73. The Chairman then invited participants to comment on these proposals.

74. The PUP asked whether the Plenary could resume at 12.00 instead of 14.00 on 10 June. The party subsequently withdrew this suggestion.

75. The SDLP asked whether there would be further meetings of the Plenary the following week other than that scheduled for 10 June at 14.00.

76. The Chairman said that it was unclear whether there would be additional meetings of the Plenary. This could be decided by the participants in Plenary session on 10 June, though he noted that there was parliamentary business at Westminster on 11 June which might require the attendance of some of the delegates. For this reason a session of the Plenary on 11 June was unlikely. Private meetings between the parties, chaired by the Chairmen, would continue on 9 to 11 June. In response to a further question from the SDLP, he said these bilateral meetings could also take place on 7 June, and invited parties to select an individual to liaise with the Office of the Chairmen on this issue.

77. The UDP asked whether parties would be available for bilateral meetings among themselves, independent of the meetings to be organised between the Chairmen and each of the parties.

78. In response the Chairman said that he would encourage and facilitate any such meetings, and expressed the hope that all of the parties would make themselves available for this purpose.

79. Raising the question of comment to the press waiting outside, the UKUP said it intended to say that it was keen to resolve the issue of decommissioning in the Plenary, and would emphasise that it was others who were preventing progress from being made on this point.

80. There being no further comments or questions, the Chairman adjourned the Plenary at 16.38 until 14.00 on Tuesday 10 June.

Independent Chairmen Notetakers
9 June 1997

OIC/PS66