

12 January 1998

JOINT STATEMENT BY THE BRITISH AND IRISH GOVERNMENTS

1. The British and Irish Governments have been working intensively over the Christmas break on the paper presented today. The title of the paper - **Propositions on Heads of Agreement** - accurately conveys both our intentions and the scope of the paper. First of all, what we have set down are propositions for debate and discussion. Secondly, the various elements, taken together, offer only the outline of an acceptable agreement. As can quickly be seen, these are not detailed proposals. Even if consensus were to be reached that they constituted a satisfactory package, a great deal of work would still be necessary.

2. These propositions are a basis for discussion, which we hope could help the talks participants move towards agreement. They have been tabled on our behalf by the Chairman, Senator Mitchell. There will be an opportunity to discuss the propositions at a meeting of the talks participants tomorrow afternoon.

3. The point has already been made about the difficulty of finding a generally satisfactory way of tabling proposals. But those in Government have a duty - especially in current circumstances - to take whatever steps are necessary to promote substantive political progress.

4. A second, crucial, point is that these propositions, while in the name of the two Governments, derive in a very real sense from the views of all parties on the various issues which arise in the talks - expressed both in bilateral meetings and in the round table discussions which have taken place. The possible propositions we have tabled represent our best guess at what could be a generally acceptable outcome goals

5. The two Governments do not have a problem

- in clarifying certain matters, for example
 - constitutional change will include changes to Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution and to Section 75 of the Government of Ireland Act 1920 and
 - the new British Irish Agreement will embrace both the intergovernmental Council and the North/South Ministerial Council, which will operate independently in their designated areas of responsibility
- and with acknowledging that matters not directly referred to in the paper will be dealt with where it makes sense, for example
 - issues where harmonising or cross-border action is appropriate will be dealt with on that basis.

identity and ethos of both communities. Appropriate steps to ensure an equivalent level of protection in the Republic.

Effective and practical measures to establish and consolidate an acceptable peaceful society, dealing with issues such as prisoners, security in all its aspects, policing and decommissioning of weapons.