

Statement by Gary McMichael to Plenary 26<sup>th</sup> Jan 1998

The Ulster Democratic Party has never ignored its responsibilities in the context of the search for a peaceful resolution of the conflict. We will not walk away from those responsibilities now.

First of all let me make it clear that the UDP's position in these Talks is based upon the mandate we achieved at the ballot box. We do, however, have an additional relevancy to the conflict resolution aspect of this process because of our voluntary relationship with loyalist paramilitaries. But the fact remains that we would not have been entitled to sit at this table but for the democratic endorsement we received at the forum election.

Despite this I recognise it is our relationship with others that has precipitated this debate and I am prepared to address the issue in that context.

The UDP signed up to the Mitchell Principles readily at the outset of the negotiations. We endorsed the principle of non-violence then and that commitment remains unequivocal. We are as appalled by recent violence as the other participants and I am satisfied that every effort has been made by the entire leadership of the UDP to utilise our influence to its fullest extent to bring that violence to an end.

Influence, however, should not be confused as control or direction. The UDP does not have the power or the desire to direct any paramilitary organisation. We have consciously sought to develop a relationship with the UFF in order that we may encourage those who have traditionally expressed themselves through physical force that the only viable means of resolving the conflict between our divided peoples is through non-violence and the democratic process.

While we have taken on this mantle, by no means do we make the policy decisions of the UFF or any other organisation. We have control solely of the policy of the UDP. When the UFF brought an end to its hostilities in 1994, it was its decision. When it decided to engage hostilities once again and subsequently bring that violence to an end, it was its decision.

We were unaware that the UFF had taken the decision to carry out attacks in recent times. There was no deception on our part, nor would we have countenanced such deception. Equally when it became plain that there was firm evidence of UFF involvement the UDP acted, and thankfully that element of the violence was brought to an end and the UFF clarified its position. I cannot estimate to what extent our views influenced that decision, but the UDP's active opposition to the continuation of violence was absolute and forceful.

In a public statement I made on Saturday, I re-enforced the UDP's position, saying:

"In numerous press interviews I stated clearly that the UDP's priority was to seek an end to the spiral of violence which has gripped our province. The UFF statement represents some success in that effort.

Our attempt to address the current crisis has not been influenced by concerns about the UDP's political future. The UDP's position at the Talks has always been secondary to the protection of life.

Yet because of our efforts others are trying to eject us from the negotiations. I feel it important to once again outline my party's attitude to violence and dispel notions that the UDP has breached the Mitchell Principles.

**The Ulster Democratic Party is fully and irreversibly committed to the principles of non-violence embodied by the Mitchell Principles. We actively oppose the use of violence for political purposes, regardless from where it emanates. That opposition is non-selective and applies equally to all the violent events the people of Northern Ireland have endured.**

Since the most recent spiral of violence was initiated by the INLA, we have stated our opposition to it clearly and consistently and UDP representatives have repeatedly called for its end.

I feel compelled to express my concern that further tragic attacks have taken place and once again call on those responsible, and those who may be contemplating further attacks, to immediately desist.

I believe that the UDP has been honest and forthright in its approach to the current security crisis and in the fulfilment of its moral and political responsibilities.”

If parties feel compelled to formally indict the UDP because of its actions to end political violence by exerting its influence to the scope of its reach, then do so. The UDP stands firmly by its position and its actions, but we are not miracle workers. The transition from physical force to democratic non-violent expression is not an easy one in a divided society like ours, in which the conflict has become so deeply entrenched. That transition may not be made in one single leap, but I believe that if the UDP is unanchored from this Talks process and therefore the peace process, it will do nothing to advance the search for a peaceful resolution of Northern Ireland's conflict.