



Minister of State

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/s/ October 1997

At yesterday's meeting of the Business Committee, it was envisaged that the opening meetings in each of the three strands should be held next Tuesday. I am writing to you in connection with the meeting of Strand One, which the British Government chairs. In accordance with the advice of the Business Committee I propose that this should start promptly 10.00 am and finish no later than 1.00 pm.

I suggest that the first item should be a round of opening statements by each of the participants. If we are to finish within the time set aside, it will be necessary to limit the length of these statements to around 10 minutes per party, certainly no longer than 15 minutes. Each party would, consistently with previous practice, be free to publish its own statement.

In order to facilitate the next day's planned meeting of the Business Committee, I propose that once that round of statements has been completed we should have a discussion of half an hour or so on the scheduling of future meetings in Strand One. It will be for the Business Committee the following day to make recommendations on the scheduling of the Talks as a whole, but we may wish to consider what pattern of meeting (one day a week, a week at a time, etc) would best suit us from the point of view of Strand One business. The Government will do its best to facilitate whatever arrangement participants prefer.





I should like to raise a few other points. The Talks are protected by the principle of confidentiality embodied in Rule 16, and I understand that at the Business Committee meeting, most participants identified a continuing general need to protect the process in this way. It was agreed, however, that there remained an issue to be considered about public information.

One matter we might consider is regular press communiqués. Though the detail of discussion is confidential, there is an entirely understandable public interest in the general progress of negotiations. A possibility is that at the end of each session, the Chairman might seek agreement of participants to a short note for public release about the nature of the business conducted that day. We could discuss this principle briefly on Tuesday, and, if it is agreed, the text that might be issued for that session.

Finally, as to participation in the meeting, Rule 28 makes clear that only elected delegates may represent participating parties, but they may be supported by others who are not elected. The rule envisages that the Business Committee should agree the numbers involved, but there has been no such agreement so far. Unless participants have objections, we will proceed on the basis of practice in the Plenary with parties fielding up to 3 delegates, and up to 3 people in support.

*D. A. Sweeney*  
pp. **Paul Murphy MP**  
**Minister of State**

*(Approved by the Minister +  
Signed in his absence).*