

SDLP PRESS OFFICE : PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS, STORMONT

SDLP STATEMENT ON THE MITCHELL REVIEW

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The SDLP is unequivocally committed to the comprehensive and successful implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, an agreement firmly based on our party's fundamental values. As a new century approaches, the Agreement offers us all the chance to transcend our past, to leave behind division and conflict for once and for all. It has the capacity to transform relationships in Northern Ireland, throughout Ireland, and between the peoples of these islands. Moreover, it has been overwhelmingly endorsed by the people of Ireland, North and South. To flout this democratic imperative would be an outrage.

Throughout the past eighteen months, and in particular during the present Review, the SDLP has worked constructively with Senator Mitchell and the other parties to find a way through the impasse over decommissioning and the formation of the institutions. We are fully committed to the principles on devolution and decommissioning agreed in June, which form the basis of the Review. Our own proposals to Senator Mitchell were based on these principles which we now believe should be implemented in a pragmatic, workable and determined way. While frustrated at the slow progress, we have continued to urge all involved to be generous and flexible, and, for the sake of all our people, to put aside narrow party or sectional interests.

At this critical juncture we urge all parties to continue working in the new spirit of understanding that has come to characterise the latter stages of the Review and so ensure its successful completion. We encourage all paramilitary organisations to respond to the emerging context and engage directly and co-operatively with the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning. We reiterate yesterday's call to respond positively to the Commission's assessment and appoint authorised representatives.

We believe that the Review can succeed in providing a basis for ensuring the comprehensive implementation of the agreement. Within the Review we have not just sought a timeframe for the appointment of the Executive and the transfer of powers. We have also had regard to the exercise of those powers as well as to the establishment of the North-South Ministerial Council, the British-Irish Council, the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference and the Consultative Civic Forum.

The outcome of the Review should mark a major step forward. But with the establishment of the institutions, the real work will only begin. While working constructively to break the impasse which has stalled the process, the SDLP has also been giving careful consideration to the major economic and social issues to be addressed following a successful resolution.

We have been preparing policies for the new administration's programme of government, for the North/South, and East/West institutions, as well as detailing the tasks to be undertaken by these bodies. We also look forward to the early establishment of the Civic Forum.

The SDLP is determined that all the new political institutions will succeed not just in building new relationships but in making a real difference to the lives of all of our people.

Last year with the Good Friday Agreement and the referenda the parties and the people achieved an emancipation of hope. Our collective task now is the emancipation of opportunity. There is no more time to waste.

Ends

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Further information: Barry Turley 521 364 / 07808 770870