

SDLP

Sir Ninian

May I initially thank you for agreeing to act as Chairman of Stage II of the talks process, and for your invitation to our party to take part in today's deliberations. We offer you a warm welcome and are confident that with your guidance our discussions and negotiations can be brought to a successful conclusion.

We recognise that the historical significance of today's meeting derives from two factors. Firstly, that the two Sovereign Governments and the Northern Ireland political parties are, together addressing the relationships among the peoples of the island of Ireland, is of itself a manifestation of the commitment of all participants to come to grips with every aspect of the problem, and to create a solution in the only way possible - through dialogue, understanding and agreement.

The other fundamental significance is that today we begin to deal with the central relationship which goes right to the heart of the problem - the relationship between Unionists and the rest of Ireland. Only when that relationship is settled to the satisfaction of both will the problem be solved, and will any arrangement work.

All previous attempts have failed because of that issue, because of that failure to address the central relationship and to reconcile and to acknowledge the rights of the two major traditions that exist in Ireland.

The consequence of that failure has not just crippled political progress. It affects every aspect of our lives - social, economic and culture. It has resulted in recurring paramilitary violence and nurtured suspicion and distrust. It has distorted what we have in common and destroyed that unity of purpose which is required if we are to create a stable, peaceful island providing economic well-being for all our people.

We have an historic opportunity to end that spiral of failure by addressing the issues of stage 2 honestly and openly. Our party is seeking agreement, not petty victories; the only victory which matters, for all of us, will be found in the creation of an agreed solution which can lead to a peaceful stable Ireland.

It is in that spirit, Sir Ninian, that we propose our agenda, recognising that as we progress we may wish to consider further areas for discussion. We are also aware that it is impossible to compartmentalise debate of this nature, and that there will be areas of overlap which cannot be anticipated.

However, we can, even at this stage, identify a logical progression in our proposed agenda which in many ways follows the sequential approach used in Stage I.

Items 1, 2 and 3 are self-explanatory. Item 4 will identify areas of common interest North and South and those issues of identity and allegiance which need to be dealt with under Item 6.

Item 5 provides an opportunity to explore, and decide upon, ways in which the whole of the island of Ireland can fully and equitably benefit from membership of the European Community.

Item 7 leads logically to consideration of possible new structures and arrangements to meet the requirements established under Items 4, 5 and 6 and to give practical and symbolic expression to the rights of both traditions thus identified.

Items 8 and 9 are suggested at this point in the Agenda when it may be necessary to consider consequential measures needed to implement and consolidate any new structures and arrangements. They would also allow for discussion on the means of endorsing any agreement reached.

Item 10 would deal with measures consequential on the implementation of such endorsement.

AGENDA PROPOSED BY THE SDLP

1. Chairman's Address
2. Adoption of Agenda
3. Opening statements by representatives of the two Governments and the political parties.
4. Relationships among the people of the island of Ireland
  - (a) to identify areas of common interest;
  - (b) to discuss issues of identity and allegiance.
5. North-South relationships in the context of the European Community.
6. Requirements
  - (a) to acknowledge the rights of both major traditions in Ireland;
  - (b) to accommodate those rights;
  - (c) to create the means of reconciling both traditions;
7. Structures and arrangements to meet these requirements and to give institutional expression to them.
8. Relationship of new structures and arrangements with other institutions.
9. Means of endorsement of agreement reached.
10. Measures consequential on the implementation of the endorsement.