

6 JULY 1992

STRAND 2: REPORT FROM CHAIRMAN OF STRAND 1

I should like first to follow the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach in expressing our warmest thanks to you, Sir Ninian, for agreeing to act as our independent Chairman. We are extremely grateful to you for your commitment to the Talks process, and for your patience. The meeting on 19 June which you chaired has confirmed that we can have every confidence that you will preside over Strand 2 in a wise, impartial and even-handed way.

I now report upon the Strand 1 discussions of the last few weeks.

Valuable progress has been made in the Talks so far. It was agreed, Sir Ninian, that you and the Irish Government should be given copies of all the papers that had been 'banked' or agreed in Sub-Committee and noted by plenary in Strand 1 in order to assist you in the Strand 2 deliberations. The parties have been notified as to which papers have been passed over. This report will advert to some of them but it need not cite them, and accordingly it can be brief.

The Strand 1 participants have agreed a number of Common Themes and a set of Common Principles which all agree should be the criteria against which any proposed arrangements should be judged.

We have also agreed a number of statements relevant to the need to protect, respect and express the identities of those from each of the main traditions within the community in Northern Ireland.

A certain measure of agreement on new political institutions was recorded in the Sub-Committee report of 13 May. A number of other important principles were acknowledged in the further Sub-Committee reported noted by plenary on 1 June. The Possible Outline Framework

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for new political institutions in Northern Ireland, which was first considered by plenary on 3 June, indicated a wider and higher level of provisional and conditional agreement.

The Sub-Committee report of 10 June further expanded the amount of common ground, clearly identified the areas of disagreement and reached a measure of agreement on a range of other matters, especially the future relationship between any new political institutions in Northern Ireland and the Westminster Parliament. That was supplemented by the further Sub-Committee report of 16 June.

I indicated in my statement to plenary of 12 June that the Irish Government and I would invite you, Sir Ninian, to convene a meeting, to be attended by representatives of the two Governments and of the four Northern Ireland political parties participating in the Talks, to discuss a possible agenda for Strand 2 of the Talks. I also proposed that the two Governments should hold a meeting in Strand 3 formation, which observers from each of the parties would be invited to attend, to give preliminary consideration to the issues likely to arise in that Strand. I further proposed that in the meantime the Strand 1 Sub-Committee should be invited to continue its work. The programme of meetings and work envisaged on 12 June has been satisfactorily completed.

In the light of this, and given that the statement of 26 March 1991 recognised that all three strands would be underway within weeks of each other and that all parties were committed to participating actively and directly in the North/South discussions, I thought it right to undertake consultations on whether an appropriate point had been reached to begin the later Strands.

Following these consultations, I judged it appropriate formally to propose that the later strands of the Talks should be launched. I so informed the four political parties concerned, the Irish Government and yourself, Sir Ninian. I am happy to report that in the light of the points which I made during consultation, and in

plenary session, the party leaders indicated that they accepted the proposal, and that the Irish Government also accepted the proposal. Accordingly here we all are. Many people both within and outside this process are not a little surprised by what we have achieved, incomplete though it certainly is as yet. Much courage and vision have been shown. We may all of us be heartened by our progress to tackle the next strands with perhaps a little more confidence, with the very welcome participation now of the Irish Government alongside that of the United Kingdom. Anyone who is feeling overawed will I am sure be reassured by the homely surroundings which my Government has arranged for our proceedings. More seriously, we all know the deep significance of what we have been engaged in, and of what lies before us.

There is now an historic opportunity for us to achieve a new beginning for relationships within Northern Ireland, within the island of Ireland, and between the peoples of these islands. The statement of 26 March 1991 places on record the readiness of all concerned to participate in good faith, and to make every effort to achieve progress towards that end.

Since 29 April real commitment has been shown to a process into whose next stage we all now gratefully invite you to lead us.