

AN ALLIANCE COMMENT ON ITEM 6

August 1992

UNDERLYING REALITIES, IDENTITY, ALLEGIANCE AND CONSTITUTIONS

We have been asked to give our views on item 6 of the agenda.

In our opening presentation to Strand 2 we addressed what we believe to be the fundamental Strand 2 aspects of the problem, and the common interests that we all share. These were, as we stated in that paper, our views and responses to the issues raised in items 6 and 7 of the agreed agenda for strand 2.

It was agreed by all of the participants to this conference that no useful purpose would be served by the repeated production of papers. In any case it is time for us to move from generalities to concrete realities. We will therefore simply note down the matters which we feel need to be addressed under item 6 in the hope that we can then move rapidly to discussing institutional proposals for Strand 2 relationships. (For convenience we also append a copy of our opening paper.)

1. The people of Northern Ireland, despite their obvious divisions, form a historic community, and have the right to determine their own future. This has in practice been accepted in all serious attempts to address the issue since 1920, and has been stated by all parties to these Talks.
2. The Northern Ireland community, is characterised by deep divisions. A primary objective must be the protection and the valuing of minority traditions.
3. There must be no illusions about the nature and the strength of the attitudes of the people of Northern Ireland. The problem in Ireland was not created by the border. The border was a result of the problem. The ferocity with which the various convictions have been held has led to chronic and very serious violence.
4. There is a majority of people in Northern Ireland who wish it to remain part of the United Kingdom because of their British Unionist allegiance.
5. There are others like Alliance whose view on the issue is not based on questions of nationhood but who believe that the social and economic interests of the people of Northern Ireland are best served by remaining within the United Kingdom.
6. There is also a large minority of the population who wish Northern Ireland to be outside of the United Kingdom, and within an All-Ireland Republic, and this belief is based on their Irish Nationalist allegiance. (This allegiance should

not be confused with a sense of Irishness which is felt in the context of culture, music, sport or language.)

7. These deeply held aspirations are the underlying realities which we find in the hearts and minds and relationships of our people and it is our task to recognize them, to respect them and to address how a compromise may be reached that gives a legitimate place to each of them.

8. The existence of the Irish Nationalist tradition requires that relations with the Republic of Ireland will consist of more than mere good neighbourliness.

9. Such institutional relations will require the promotion of a mutual respect and recognition which has not existed before.

10. It has been said repeatedly by those who support the Anglo-Irish Agreement, that such respect and recognition is contained already in Article 1 of the Agreement. This was also said of the Sunningdale Agreement. At that time, in 1973, my predecessor Oliver Napier said, "...that recognition now makes a nonsense of those terms in your Constitution which claim jurisdiction over our territory. We now expect you to take urgent steps to bring in a new Constitution which is consistent with your Government's solemn declaration of recognition." This is no less relevant today. We are familiar with proposals, and indeed proposed wordings, from politicians in the Republic of Ireland which would replace the offending claim, with an aspiration. We ourselves have a proposed wording which would be acceptable to us and which we wish to explore with others at the appropriate juncture. We look forward to seeing from the Government of the Republic of Ireland, their proposals for a solution to this problem, which may form part of the overall package which emerges from these Talks.

11. The Anglo-Irish Agreement recognizes that there is a wider context that must be considered. This should be recognized in Tri-partite Structures, already prefigured in the participation at these Talks.

12. In every community, stability and prosperity require the achievement and maintenance of law and order. Commitment to this principle must also govern relationships between the two parts of this island.

13. There is a price to be paid for peace in Northern Ireland not only by those who live there, but also by those who live outside of Northern Ireland, in the rest of the United Kingdom, in the Republic of Ireland, and indeed further afield.

14. We come to these talks as six different delegations, each with our own perceptions, analyses, policies and priorities.

We understand our problems differently. If we did not, we would not be in different parties and there would not be a problem. The important task before us is not to agree an analysis, but to agree institutions which are capable of meeting our basic needs and of satisfying, in some measure, our differing aspirations and ideals, and those of the people we represent. In short the outcome must have a considerable degree of **acceptability**.

15. In strand 1 we also took the view that along with **acceptability**, we should strive for **workability, durability and stability**. These would also seem to be desirable ends in strand 2.