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I wanted personally to let you know that we have decided to inform the House of Commons, and the main constitutional parties in Northern Ireland, that the Government has decided to embark on consultations with other parties about the establishment of a Northern Ireland Select Committee on the basis that the time for one has now come. You may have noticed that the Procedure Committee in its recent report said.

'We do not believe that the uncertainty about the future administration of the Province can be allowed to preclude indefinitely the establishment of proper arrangements for the scrutiny by the House of the Northern Ireland department'.

The matter is indeed, as the Taoiseach was good enough to say in Downing Street yesterday, a matter for the House of Commons. This was also recognised by all the parties in Strand I of last year's talks. We shall be consulting as to the composition of such a Committee, before putting forward a resolution for debate.

I am quite confident that, relating solely to the means of scrutiny, this decision will in no way restrict the ambit of the Talks process. Equally, I think it will have a stabilising influence in Northern Ireland at this juncture if the announcement is made today.