

## FILE NOTE

Wednesday 28 September 1994, 10.00

Meeting to discuss arrangements for Forum for Peace and Reconciliation at Alliance HQ. A range of topics was covered, raised by both sides.

|          |              |                       |
|----------|--------------|-----------------------|
| Present: | Alliance     | Secretariat           |
|          | Seamus Close | Walter Kirwan.        |
|          | David Ford   | Dept of the Taoiseach |
|          |              | Tim O'Connor, DFA     |

### Membership

WK referred to New Ireland Forum, parties represented on basis of proportionality, suggesting NI (3 parties) would get disproportionate share of seats.

SC pointed out that NI talks gave equality to 4 parties. Forum needed a NI voice, especially Alliance, and reminded Secretariat of the flack we had received for agreeing to attend.

After WK spoke of need to keep numbers workable (ref to WP), SC and DF said Forum was to reconcile differences, not negotiate, and also advised direct contact with other Unionists.

### Purpose and Timing

WK said idea was to drag SF into political process and build confidence among both Unionists and Republicans. He added it would be a bridging exercise, building confidence ahead of all-party talks.

SC emphasised that Forum was not for negotiation but to address areas of fear and distrust and to build goodwill. He suggested areas like decommissioning arms, opening border roads and aspects of political and community life were part of trust-building.

WK agreed there should be no talk about structures and responded to a question about the timing of the Framework Document by saying it could be delayed beyond end of October.

SC said if we were serious we must get on with things. It was not in our interests for there to be a delay, the Forum was needed to end suspicions.

### Content

WK asked if Forum could tease out issues like parity of esteem in NI, pluralism in ROI, and highlighted the importance of economic issues, especially re Europe, Irish America.

**NB Alliance ideas needed on tackling these issues.**

SC emphasised that Forum should be as open as possible, to avoid sniping from outside. This should be less difficult if there was no negotiation. Sec. were fairly receptive to this.

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A. emphasised the perception in NI that this was a pan-Nationalist front, and govt must be made aware of this. SC added that we might agree on economy, or a Bill of Rights, but the perception of the problem was not the same.

#### **Chair and Timetable**

WK said it was important to have a chair who understood both sides of the divide. SC suggested a shortlist should be circulated: what was needed was business/negotiating skills.

WK suggested this would be a continuing body, requiring an intensive phase until there was real political activity, then it might lessen. Meetings would probably be one day per week.

SC agreed that an intensive burst was needed to start, probably then needing more than one day per week. There was a danger in making the process open-ended. WK said it was hoped to start in late October.

#### **Secretariat and Facilities**

WK said Sec. would have to be staffed from public service. It might be possible to allow party nominations from within public service N or S - apparently for benefit of SF. DF said we had assumed they would staff Sec. themselves, but if there were nominating rights for any we would expect them for Alliance.

WK wished to facilitate parties, subject to costs. Expenses, daily allowance, accom. in Dublin Castle were all OK. They were sympathetic to staff help for Northern parties.

#### **Rules of Procedure**

WK said NIForum had operated on basis of good sense between chair and steering ctee. A meeting of Whips could sort out business: might have to get away from consensus for business procedure. There were ideas for a grand opening.

#### **Numbers**

Discussion concluded on membership issue. WK suggested about 35 members plus alternates, allowing for absent Unionists.

SC repeated that Alliance sought parity, at least for three Northern parties and emphasised our role in NI and in the Forum. DF gave numbers as to why, even if parity was not implemented, it was totally unacceptable for SF to have more than Alliance.

DF