



Key points from initial Fine Gael contribution to the discussions of the terms of reference and modus operandi of the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation

Introduction

Fine Gael approaches discussions about the Forum in a positive way; we want it to achieve its full potential and support the Government in its desire to make the Forum work effectively. We would not wish to be part of something that was mere window dressing.

Detailed terms of reference for the Forum should be negotiated with all the possible participants on a basis of mutual respect and esteem. Any draft terms of reference submitted by non-Government parties should have equal status in negotiation with terms submitted by Government parties.

The Government's draft Terms of Reference for the Forum have been presented to Fine Gael and are insufficient to the achievement of the Forum's stated purpose of reconciling both traditions on the island. Fine Gael believes that other issues must also be added to the Terms of Reference, and has submitted a redraft.

If the Forum is to be an instrument for reconciliation, both of the people's to be reconciled must be fully represented at it. In any area of life, it is almost impossible to achieve reconciliation with a partner who is absent. Enormous time and effort must therefore be devoted to creating conditions for full Unionist participation in the Forum, before it is set up.

The following is a summary of issues and questions which Fine Gael will be discussing with the Government parties and all the other parties invited to be represented at the Forum

Timetable

The purpose and duration of the Forum should be clear from the outset.

The setting of an artificial timetable which would force Unionists to make an early formal decision on participation is undesirable.

To ask the Unionists to take a decision in advance of the British Government's timescale for verification is unrealistic and may prejudice them against participation.

It is important to leave the door open to participation by smaller Unionist parties if participation of larger Unionist parties cannot be obtained from the outset

In advance of the meeting of the Forum the Taoiseach should ask Mr Gerry Adams to ask the IRA to clarify their position on dumps of offensive weapons in their possession and on "exclusion orders" applied by the IRA to certain individuals in nationalist areas of Northern Ireland.

Method of Work

Consideration should be given to asking all the parties taking part in the Forum to sign a peace pledge

Employment should have a very high place on the agenda of the Forum.

The Forum should examine the consequences of twenty five years of violence, and hear the views of those who have been victims of violence

To whom will it report ? What will be its statutory, legal, financial and constitutional basis? Will it work by unanimity or majority vote? Will representation be by votes cast or seats won or, alternatively, will there be some form of weighted representation?

Will it have any input to the current inter-Governmental negotiations in regard to the Framework document?

The holding of Forum sessions in public or private cannot be determined until efforts to persuade the principal Unionist parties to attend have been brought to a conclusion

Consideration should be given to having a non-Government party politician in the Chair.

Members should aim at the highest common denominator, not the lowest. Therefore the Rapporteur model, as used in the European Parliament should be considered.

Links with other bodies

Consideration might be given to a formal link being established between the Forum and the Westminster based House of Commons Select Committee on Northern Ireland