

FS/DC

First Meeting of the Drafting Committee
Dublin Castle, 19 May 1995

Summary Note

1. The first meeting of the Drafting Committee was held in Dublin Castle on 19 May. The Committee was established by the Forum to explore the extent to which agreement could be reached on, and to seek to draft, a set of Realities relating to the nature of the problem and the Principles upon which a resolution might be based. The establishment of the Committee was in follow-up to a previous series of debates in the Forum on the "Nature of the Problem and the Principles underlying its Resolution". As an aid to the Committee's consideration of the issue, the Secretariat circulated a paper (F240C), setting out broad possible headings for a set of such Realities and Principles. This note sets out in summary form the main points of the discussion on 19 May. [A list of those attending the meeting is attached.]

Main Points of Discussion:

2. In her opening remarks, the Chairperson reiterated the background to the establishment of the Committee. She emphasised the complex and sensitive nature of the initiative being embarked upon, and the need in that regard for a high level of confidentiality. She suggested that the Committee might seek to meet, in principle, once a fortnight, but that, allowing for the Washington Conference and other commitments, its next session might be scheduled for 9 June (ie three weeks hence). She saw the principal business of this first meeting as a general discussion of the role and objectives of the Committee.

3. There followed a wide-ranging discussion along the lines suggested by the Chairperson. It was clear that there was a broad spread of views among the members about what was envisaged. These may be summarised as follows (it will be clear that the points listed represent - in greatly condensed form - the views of individual, or groups of, members, and not in any sense the consensual position in each case of the Committee as a whole):

Was an agreed report being sought? Important groups were not in the Forum: there was a danger that the production of such a document would widen further the gap between those who were here and those who were not. One possibility in seeking to address this danger was to ensure, to the greatest extent feasible, that the unionist perspective was factored into the drafting process.

There was real value at this time in agreeing a set of principles which could be presented to the unionists as a basis for beginning a dialogue. This was a more proper approach than devising actual structures and models for government, given that unionists would certainly reject these. Unionist thinking was in an evolutionary phase and therefore presenting a set of principles for discussion to them now could be most timely. The Forum's capacity to engage in this process had been strengthened by the fact that it had received input from groups and individuals reflecting the views of important and

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influential communities inside the unionist/loyalist tradition.

What kind of principles were involved? Would they be of a "catch-all/motherhood" nature, to which everybody could sign up? If so, what was the value of such an exercise, which could be superficial? Were principles immutable? Reference was made to a similar "principles" exercise undertaken during the 1992 Talks. Moreover, were not the main principles in any case already recently set out in the Joint Declaration and the Framework Document? Was there not a danger that the initiative now being proposed might lead to a pulling back from the principles set out in those two documents?

Questions had been raised to which it was impossible to give answers at this time. What was involved was an incremental process - answers might become clearer as we went along. What was being embarked upon was, in a sense, an update of the principles outlined in the New Ireland Forum Report. Indeed, on a specific note, it was suggested that members might re-look at the latter and consider the extent to which they were still relevant.

It was important to avoid any sense of a "pan-nationalist front".

The work of the Committee, and indeed the Forum generally, could not be divorced from, and needed to keep in step with, what was happening elsewhere. One might hope for some convergence between such outside developments and the Committee's work. Consensus on the key issues was going to be difficult, both in the Forum and outside, but they had to be seriously tackled. What was the position of the British Government?

A fresh look was needed at the concept of consensus within the context of self-determination. What was required was a consensus-based decision which everybody could live with.

The difficulties were going to centre on the issues of self-determination, agreement and consent. Should the Committee start with these, or should one begin with the "easier" issues and move progressively to the "difficult"?

The assumption was that representatives in the Committee would seriously engage in its work but there was not going to be 100% agreement, certainly at the outset. There was a need for confidence building (within the Committee). The experience of the New Ireland Forum - and other negotiations - suggested that one left the difficult elements until the end.

There was a case for taking blocks of related realities and principles together. Delegations should review their initial papers on the Nature of the Problem in light of subsequent discussions in the Forum.

There was a case also for taking the realities first and, once those were agreed, moving on to the principles. Moreover, it was preferable, if the Committee was to be workable, that in each case the first and other early drafts came from the Secretariat (rather than

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have every Delegation tabling its own). As a first step, the Secretariat could flesh out the headings listed in F2/DC.

Next Steps

4. Following this discussion, it was agreed that, as a next step, the Secretariat would produce a draft in advance of the next meeting, fleshing out the headings under the Realities section of F2/DC. It was agreed that Delegations could forward any views in this regard directly to the Secretariat.
5. The next meeting was fixed for Friday 9 June

Forum Secretariat
31 May 1995

Drafting Committee Meeting, 19 May 1995

List of Attendees

Uanna Fíol	Noel Dempsey
SDLP	John Hume Seamus Mallon
Fine Gael	Austin Currie Dan Ryan
Labour	Brian Fitzgerald Fergus Finlay
Sinn Féin	Pat Doherty Rita O'Hare
Progressive Democrats	John Dardis
Alliance	John Alderdice Seamus Close
Democratic Left	Seamus Lynch Paddy Gilien
Green Party/Comhaontas Glas	Eugene O'Shea
Senator Gordon Wilson	Senator Gordon Wilson Aisling Maguire
Independent Deputies	Neil Blaney Tom Foxe
Independent Senators	Joe Lee Enda Dowling
Workers' Party	John Lowry Pat O'Connell