

JOINT DECLARATION INITIATIVE

Points to make

1. For some years Mr Hume has been engaged in an undisclosed dialogue with Mr Adams in an attempt to persuade the Provisional Movement to renounce violence. He has sought in particular to persuade the Provisional Movement that the British Government does not constitute an obstacle to the objective of a united Ireland, save to the extent that it is committed to the principle that there will be no change to the status of Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom without the consent of a majority of its people.

2. Mr Hume has intermittently kept both the British and Irish Governments informed of his dialogue. In the latter stages at least this appears to have centred on the notion that the British and Irish Governments might make a "Joint Declaration" setting out certain principles on the basis of which the Provisional Movement would abandon violence. Earlier this year the Hume/Adams dialogue became public and on 25 September they made a statement saying that they were reporting the matter to the Irish Government. It is not known precisely what that report contained, or indeed whether Hume and Adams did succeed in agreeing a single text.

3. In parallel the Irish Government appears to have been conducting an indirect dialogue of its own with the Provisional Movement, also centred on successive drafts of a "Joint Declaration". Various drafts have been shown to the British Government by the Irish Government, though the British side has declined to negotiate on them.

4. In Brussels on 29 October the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach issued a Joint Statement making it clear that they could not adopt or endorse the outcome of Hume/Adams. They committed themselves however to continuing to work together in their own terms to promote peace, stability and reconciliation.

5. Initial consultations with Mr Molyneaux suggested that if a Joint Declaration in terms of the Irish draft were made the Unionists would be alienated, with possible consequences for a rise in Loyalist paramilitary activity.

6. An alternative British version, in the form of a communiqué from the forthcoming of Heads of Government meeting, was prepared and cleared with Mr Molyneaux. The Cabinet Secretary took it to the Taoiseach in Dublin on Friday 26 November. Although most of the key substantive elements are common to both, and much of the Irish language is incorporated in the British version, the Irish Government has reacted badly to the British version, as if it were a wrecking amendment. The revelations of indirect contact between the Provisional Movement and the British Government have further upset them.

7. In an attempt to prove that the British Government's judgement of Unionist reaction is misplaced, and over-dependent on contact with Mr Molyneaux, the Irish Government has taken a number of steps to second-guess it. This has included consultation with various church leaders in Northern Ireland. On our part we have consulted Mr Molyneaux again on the latest version of the Joint Declaration prepared by the Irish Government, and incorporating some lengthy passages prepared by Archbishop Eames and intended to indicate a willingness on the part of the Irish Government to reach out to unionism.

8. The upshot of this is that Mr Molyneaux appears ready to acquiesce in the Joint Declaration, subject to some relatively minor and probably negotiable changes. This is also on the basis, on which the British Government would also insist, that the text included these "constitutional guarantee". In earlier exchanges the Irish Government has said that this change alone would render the text "unsaleable" to the Provisionals.

9. Mr Molyneaux's acquiescence is also on the basis that the declaration does not contain a proposal (to which Mr Hume in particular is believed to be attached) that the Irish Government announces the establishment of a "permanent Irish Convention" which would be advisory to the Irish Government alone on the steps required to remove the barriers of distrust which at present divide the people of Ireland. There are signs of the Irish Government would agree to drop this, provided the text included a reference to the willingness of the British Government to enter exploratory dialogue with Sinn Fein after a demonstrated end to IRA violence.

10. On this basis it is hoped that at the forthcoming Heads of Government meeting, agreement can be reached on a text. It is believed that the Irish Government would then convey it to the Provisional Movement on a take it or leave it basis. It would be for judgement whether the two Governments would wish to make the Statement in any event: even if there were no certainty that it would induce the Provisional Movement to end their campaign it would push them on the back foot, and demonstrate that the two Governments had agreed on the limits to which they could go. The Provisionals would accordingly be denied of any delusory hope of securing further advantage.

11. Much of the Joint Declaration is rhetorical. In words attributed to the Prime Minister there would be acknowledgement that the British Government have no selfish strategic or economic interest in retaining Northern Ireland in the United

Kingdom against the wishes of a majority of its people. It would be stated that the British Government's primary interest is to see peace, stability and reconciliation established by agreement. The British Government's role would be to foster agreement through a process of dialogue respecting the rights of identities of both traditions. We should acknowledge that such agreement might take the form of agreed structures for the island as a whole. (The Anglo-Irish Agreement of course already commits the British Government to promote legislation to bring about a united Ireland if that ever becomes the wish of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland.) There would also be a commitment to implement any measure of agreement on future relationships in Ireland which the people living in Ireland might themselves determine. Crucially there would be a sentence referring to self-determination in terms yet to be settled.

If agreement on a text is secured at tomorrow's meeting there is likely to be a further meeting of the Heads of Government before Christmas when the Joint Declaration would be made.

12. There remains a risk that a Joint Declaration in the terms which are likely to emerge would provoke a hostile reaction from Unionists. Their suspicions have been aroused by the Hume/Adams initiative, and by the recent revelations of contact between the British Government and the Provisional Movement. There have also been cases in the past where Mr Molyneux has proved unable or unwilling to sustain in public private indications of support or tacit acceptance. The matter is complicated by the certainty that if a Joint Declaration does lead the Provisional Movement to renounce violence then Hume and Adams will claim sponsorship for the Declaration. They might even take pleasure in announcing that, despite the terms of the Brussels Joint Statement, the two Governments had after all found it possible to endorse and adopt the Hume/Adams report.