

SPEAKING NOTE

Most grateful to you for briefing Sir Robin Butler on 6 June in the way that you did. I entirely understand the importance which you attached to this. The information that both Sinn Fein and the IRA would accept the latest text as a basis for an alternative political strategy for peace, which would involve the lasting cessation of violence, is clearly an important development.

2. You will recall our discussion of these matters in the first part of 1992, and particularly on 26 February. I did not close the door on the principle of the Joint Declaration, but told you that I would have no alternative but to be sceptical and hard-headed.

3. I have to tell you that the text which was handed to Sir Robin Butler is still a very long way from anything which the British Government could accept. Most of the drafting goes back at least to the first half of 1992, and the middle three sentences of paragraph 4 are very close to an amendment from June 1992 which we believe originated from the PAC.

4. Any declaration of this sort would be a political fact of profound significance in Northern Ireland. I have to say that it would not be read in the way envisaged in your Aide-Memoire. The Aide-Memoire, for instance, gives a weight to the agreement and consent of the people of Northern Ireland which, though it is mentioned elsewhere in the Declaration, is absent from the crucial second sentence in paragraph 4. (It is mentioned in the third and fourth sentences, but not as an unforced pre-requisite for any change in the status of Northern Ireland.)

5. My frank assessment of the impact of a Declaration with this wording in Northern Ireland is that it:

- would be seen as a betrayal;

- would prompt an escalation of Loyalist paramilitary violence which would no longer claim to be purely reactive;
- would put in question the allegiance of wider elements across the Unionist community to the rule of law and public order;
- would destroy any prospect of political progress for years; and
- would quickly make any PIRA ceasefire which had accompanied it unsustainable, as attacks were mounted on Catholics and deliberate and ultimately irresistible attempts were made to provoke the Nationalist paramilitaries.

There is no quid pro quo which, if given to the Unionists, would make such a text acceptable to them.

6. These effects could be mitigated by changes to the text, although I have to be sceptical at this stage about whether changes of this sort would leave a Declaration which would suffice to bring off a lasting cessation of PIRA violence.

7. There is a big gap between this text and what we could accept. There is no point in disguising this:

- in any passage dealing with the future status of Northern Ireland, explicit reference to the consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland, (ie as in Article 1 of the Anglo-Irish Agreement) is an absolute pre-requisite for any change;
- the penultimate sentence in paragraph 4 would be read in context as committing the British Government

to win consent in Northern Ireland to a united Ireland. Patrick Mayhew and I have repeatedly said that HMG cannot join the ranks of the persuaders;

- we could not accept any principle "that the Irish people have the right collectively to self-determination". Separate, but simultaneous and linked, tests of public opinion north and south of the border are quite another matter;

- we could not compromise our determination to defend the right of the people of Northern Ireland to remain in the United Kingdom if, and for as long as, they so wished;

- we could not agree to the specification of any time period which could be seen as relating to the future status of Northern Ireland which was not conditional upon the freely given and uncoerced consent of a majority in Northern Ireland;

- while we could envisage new North/South institutions with a substantial executive role, a dynamic mandate and capacity to develop, we could not agree to a mandate for such institutions which was designed to bring about a united Ireland or linked to a single collective act of self-determination in Ireland;

- there is no basis for the wish attributed to the people of Britain in the first sentence of paragraph 4.

8. That nevertheless leaves open a number of possibilities of the sort which were discussed between the two Governments last October in Round 2 of the political development Talks. But if any of the points I have mentioned were minimum requirements of yours, I can

see there being real difficulties between us in the Talks process. If, as I imagine, these are matters the Provisionals would like to secure, they illustrate how far this text is from one we could accept.

9. Nonetheless, if, in the light of this explanation, you would find it helpful, I should be prepared to authorise Sir Robin Butler and John Chilcot to explore without commitment with Dermot Nally the sort of principles which we might be able to consider, on the understanding that this was a matter solely between us and you at this stage.

10. I am sure that neither of us would wish to see any report of these exchanges in the Press. But that is a possibility, given the involvement of people outside our Governments. If there is any such report we would say that while we are regularly in touch with the Irish Government as well as Mr Hume and other political leaders, there is no alternative political initiative to the overt comprehensive Talks process under discussion and (if asked) no talk with paramilitaries.

11. I should welcome your assessment of John Hume's role, and of how much mileage you think there is in his further discussion with Gerry Adams. He clearly regards himself as a major player in the Joint Declaration initiative, and could make life very difficult if he felt he were being sidelined. How does he think things stand?