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## NORTHERN IRELAND BRIEFING LINES 16 DECEMBER

### Basic line to take

The points we should emphasise today are

- **The Joint Declaration set out a clear challenge to the Provisionals. This is that they should give up violence for good, and show that they have done so. The way would then be open for them to enter the political arena as a democratic party under the law.**
- **The Joint Declaration has had strong and wide support from the House of Commons, Church and Community leaders, and from people across the United Kingdom.**
- **It is now up to the Provisionals to decide. They will never have a better opportunity to opt for a peaceful future. They would have no excuse, no justification, no sympathy, and no future if they chose to continue violence.**
- **All those who are sympathetic to the nationalist tradition should urge them to take the democratic path, and help to build a better life for all the people of Northern Ireland.**
- **The Joint Declaration explicitly protects the democratic rights also of the unionists. It does not weaken or undermine the union.**
- **It reaffirms the Government's constitutional guarantee that the status of Northern Ireland will not be changed without the consent of the majority of its people.**
- **It takes no steps in the direction of joint jurisdiction of the British and Irish governments over Northern Ireland. The claims which**

have been made to this effect are entirely false, and cannot be justified by anything in the Joint Declaration.

- Nor does the British Government, in the Joint Declaration, subscribe to the "value" or "legitimacy" of a united Ireland. The British Government's position on this has not changed. We shall respect the wishes of the greater number of the people of Northern Ireland. We shall not seek to persuade them to accept a united Ireland.
- The essence of the Joint Declaration is that it offers fair treatment to both sides of the community in Northern Ireland. In the Joint Declaration, the Irish Government has shown its support for the British Government's approach to this. That should provide reassurance to nationalists.
- The cooperation of the Irish Government will be very important in helping to bring peace to Northern Ireland. But the Joint Declaration does not give the Irish Government a role in the internal affairs of Northern Ireland. This too has been misrepresented. There is nothing in the Joint Declaration to substantiate the assertion.

Will PIRA be allowed to keep their weapons? Will there be an amnesty?

- There is no question of "allowing" people in any part of the United Kingdom to hold weapons illegally, or in other ways depart from what is clearly laid down in law.
- We are asking the Provisionals to commit themselves to a permanent cessation of violence. This is not negotiable, and we are not talking of a temporary or conditional ceasefire.

- **A permanent end to violence means that those concerned must accept that they have no need for weapons, but will live peacefully under the law and will pursue their aims by democratic means.**
- **The law will continue to be applied. Those who have committed crimes will be subject to it.**
- **There are no political prisoners in Northern Ireland or anywhere in the United Kingdom. The question of an Amnesty therefore does not arise. Those who have committed criminal offences must serve their sentences.**

**How will the IRA's decision be announced and judged?**

- **We are waiting for one straightforward act from the Provisionals. That is implementation of a decision to end violence for good, and to take up our proposal that they should opt for a peaceful democratic future.**
- **It is not for us to say how the Provisionals should announce their decision. The responsibility for implementing it will rest with them. But we are confident that it will be clear to us whether or not a decision is being carried out.**

**Further meeting between John Hume and Gerry Adams?**

- **This is a matter for Mr. Hume.**
- **There is nothing in the Joint Declaration to be negotiated with the Provisionals. They have seen the position clearly set out in the Joint**

**Declaration.** They must now give an unequivocal answer to the question: will they enact a cessation to violence?

- In the House of Commons on 15 December, Mr. Hume expressed his strong support for the Joint Declaration. If he chooses to see Adams, we hope that he will put only one point to him: will you accept the Joint Declaration and give up violence for good, for you will never have a better opportunity?

**What will the "preliminary exploratory talks" with Sinn Fein discuss?**

- When a permanent cessation of violence has been established for three months, the Government would be ready to hold exploratory talks with Sinn Fein.
- The purposes of these talks would be:
  - (i) to explore the basis upon which Sinn Fein would come to be admitted to an inclusive political talks process, but without anticipating the negotiations within that process;
  - (ii) to exchange views on how Sinn Fein would be able over a period to play the same part as the current constitutional parties in the public life of Northern Ireland;
  - (iii) to examine the practical consequences of the ending of violence.
- We shall not determine the precise agenda for those talks until a cessation of violence is clearly in effect.

**Self-determination: must there be simultaneous referendums? What does "concurrently" mean? Does this give the Republic of Ireland a say in how and when Northern Ireland's future is determined?**

- Northern Ireland will of course remain a part of the United Kingdom
- **The future of Northern Ireland is for the people of Northern Ireland to determine. The Joint Declaration does not specify how they should do so.**
- **It accepts that there should be concurrent processes in the North and South of Ireland respectively. That means that the processes would run in parallel. They would not have to be simultaneous.**
- **There is nothing in the Joint Declaration to prevent an exercise in self-determination being conducted in Northern Ireland at any time. Nor does the Declaration say that self-determination must be by referendum, though a referendum would be a likely way of achieving this.**

**Could the means of self-determination be a matter for discussion in the 3-Strand talks?**

- **Yes. This would fall within the ambit of the Talks process.**
- **It would be natural to discuss, in that framework, how the acceptability of the outcome of the Talks should be determined.**

**If pressed] What broad conclusions might be reached in the Talks process?**

- **We cannot prejudge the outcome. It will be necessary to reach agreement on all three "strands" (relationships within Northern**

Ireland; between the North and the South of Ireland; and between Ireland and the United Kingdom).

- Northern Ireland will of course remain a part of the United Kingdom for as long as the majority of its people so wish. But the Talks process could decide on new arrangements for government in Northern Ireland, designed to be widely acceptable to all the people who live there.
- It could also decide on new arrangements to develop cooperation between Northern Ireland the Republic of Ireland; and to build on the close links and common interests which are shared by the two Governments.

What will be the next steps in the 3-Strand talks process

- We are seeking to carry the Talks process forward intensively.
- Michael Ancram will continue his bilateral contacts with the parties.
- The two Governments will continue their work on a framework for a lasting settlement. The Joint Declaration makes an important contribution to that. It reinforces and complements other work between the two Governments on "strand 3" issues. It clarifies mutual understanding of the consent principle, self-determination, and issues arising from Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution.
- The Government remain ready to bring forward proposals of our own, if it would be helpful to do so at an appropriate time, in order to give focus and direction to the Talks. f/ni.kk