NORTHERN IRELAND WOMEN'S COALITION RESPONSE TO THE "NOTICE OF INDICTMENT LODGED BY THE DUP ON SEPTEMBER 9TH

Procedure

1. The NIWC is in the business of promoting inclusive talk. As such we welcome the presence of the PUP and the UDP both at this table and the positive role that we have seen them play in the politics of their communities. A role that was made even more important by the sharp community devisions of the past Summer.

2. We are glad to see and we readily accept the re-affirmation by the PUP and UDP of their commitment to the Mitchell Principles, and their rejection of pursuing political aims through violence. We welcome Peter Robinson's assurances that the DUP do not want to see the PUP and UDP excluded from the Talks but I feel that we may be forgiven for treating this position with a degree of scepticism.

3. We concur with Mr McCartney that under paragraph 29 taking action "on a formal representation that a participant is no longer entitled to participate on the grounds that they have demonstrably dishonoured the principles of democracy and non-violence as set forth of the report of the International Body" is a matter of the two Governments. Participants do have a role in the process - 1) in making a formal representation and 2) in making their views known to the Governments.

4. However, we do not concur with Mr McCartney's view that the only action open to the governments is to exclude a participant from the Talks. Rule 29 clearly gives the governments discretion in the handling of any formal representation made to them through the independent chairmen including the exercise of their judgement on the appropriate action.

5. Any formal representation must provide evidence that the party against whom the governments' action is sought has demonstrably dishonoured the principles of democracy and non-violence as set out in the report of the International Body.

6. The Mitchell principles are absolutely clear. They are listed under paragraph 20 of the report. A responsible approach to a formal representation will not make unfounded allegations but will identify which of the principles have been broken and provide evidence in support of the case.

7. The DUP submission to the governments through the Independent chairman headed Notice of Indictment fails to do this.

8. Before I go further let me make absolutely clear that the NI Women's Coalition is opposed to threat, intimidation or violence of any kind from any quarter. We want no misunderstanding on this and strenuously object to any misrepresentation of our position in this room or to the media.

9. The accusation levelled at the PUP and the UDP by the DUP is that "when challenged about the (CLMC) statement the main spokesmen for the PUP and UDP refused to condemn it". Perhaps the DUP could tell us which of the 6 principles refer to a "refusal to condemn". And perhaps the DUP would care to venture an opinion on whether the Women's Coalition or the Alliance Party for example should be subject to appropriate action by the governments for a "refusal to condemn" if we were guilty of this.

10. And where is the evidence that "some of the public utterances by those same spokesmen actually endorsed the death threats", as is stated in the DUP document?

11. The DUP Notice of Indictment is heavy on views and opinions and light on facts. In fact DUP relies heavily on opinions from editorials which it obligingly fed back to those same media yesterday; no doubt hoping to sweep them along on a tide of their own opinions to cover for the lack of substance in the DUP allegations. Around this table we are left with the impression that the actions of the DUP

have been media driven and that the DUP has triggered the formal representation process without foundation and in a totally irresponsible way.

12. So the question that we must ask ourselves is why did the DUP do this? What is the real reason behind this Notice of Indictment. Could it be to cover the tracks of their own actions? Could it be to destabilise these talks?

13. If the DUP is trying to prove the case that the PUP and the UDP are associated with threatened violence for political ends, then they have provided no evidence in support of it. And indeed in the light of the Secretary of State's comments that the rule of law was violently overthrown during the Summer period, are not comments such as those recently of Mr Hunter of the UUP that "Drumcree has shown what we have always known since UWC days that we can still bring the State to its knees" - are these comments ~~set~~ more threatening to these Talks? It is the DUP itself which has elevated the CLMC ultimatum to political status underlining this through Mr McCrea sharing a platform with Mr. Wright. Given the history of the mid-Ulster UVF and the uncompromising and questionable stance of Billy Wright it is incomprehensible that the DUP would endorse and support Mr Wright while at the same time refuse to talk to the PUP and the UDP representatives at this table who have signed up to the Mitchell Principles and committed themselves to the Peace Process.

14. So why have the DUP orchestrated the campaign against the CMLC ultimatum into a Mitchell Principles issue through the media. Perhaps Mr McCartney gave us the clue to this yesterday when he posited that not only was the future of the PUP and UDP in these talks at issue, but if they are excluded the very talks themselves are under threat. In Mr McCartney's reasoning the election itself would be undermined as in his view it had been especially designed to bring in the PUP and UDP. It is understandable therefore if the rest of the parties around this table are left with the impression that the DUP through politicising the CLMC ultimatum, in collusion with the UKUP pressing for the sanction of exclusion, really intend to bring down these talks.

15. Is this the democracy the DUP is protecting?. Is this the democracy we can all look forward to?

16. In our view the DUP has failed to show that the PUP and UDP have demonstrably dishonoured the principles of democracy of non-violence as set forth in the International Body's Report.

17. In conclusion I would like to refer to the point made by Dr. Paisley yesterday on the result of the Irish Times poll on these talks. He chose to interpret the results as a vote of no-confidence in the talks. The NI Women's Coalition believes that the poll and subsequent vox pops show considerable lack of faith in some political "leaders". We look forward to the end of stalling and shadow boxing, of excluding parties and walking out. We look forward to finding that we have sufficient leaders of quality and courage among us to achieve progress and inspire the confidence of the people.

Bronagh Hinds.