

DRAFT SUMMARY RECORD OF OPENING PLENARY SESSION -
TUESDAY 22 OCTOBER 1996 (10.11)

Those present:

Independent Chairmen	Government Teams	Parties
Mr Holkeri	British Government	Alliance Party
General de Chastelain	Irish Government	Labour
		Northern Ireland Women's Coalition
		Progressive Unionist Party
		Social Democratic and Labour Party
		Ulster Democratic Party
		Ulster Democratic Unionist Party
		United Kingdom Unionist Party
		Ulster Unionist Party

1. The Chairman convened the meeting at 10.11 although both the Labour and SDLP delegations were not present (both joined the meeting a few minutes later). The Chairman then proposed the approval of four draft records from the previous week.

Previous Minutes

2. Session on 14 October 1996 - (12.09)

The DUP proposed that the sentence on line six of paragraph two of this record be amended as follows. "The DUP asked which parties were seeking a further adjournment". This record was approved with this amendment.

Session on 14 October 1996 - (18.09)

The DUP proposed that the final sentence of paragraph one of this record be amended as follows "The Chairman tabled a draft proposal

for the agenda and asked for comments on it". This record was approved with this amendment. The DUP said that, as regards paragraph two and its final two lines, the minutes were entirely accurate but it did not believe that this was the proper role for an Independent Chairmen. The Chairman in reply said that he served the meeting in as neutral a way as possible and in any other manner beyond this, the chair sought the views of all the participants. No amendments to paragraph two were made.

Session 15 October 1996 - (12.13)

The DUP asked that the word "management" be inserted on the final line at the bottom of page eight instead of the word "issue". This record was approved with this amendment.

Session 15 October 1996 - (15.13)

The UDP pointed out a typographical error on page 13, paragraph 25, line 12 where DUP appeared instead of UDP. This record was approved with this amendment.

3. The Chairman stated that two further draft records would be circulated to participants during the course of the day. These would be approved at the next plenary session. The Chairman then said that, with reference to item two on the agenda, three submissions had been received and circulated. He now wished to consult with the other participants during the lunch break regarding plans for other statements or written submissions to be made, in order that some structure could be brought to the proceedings before next week. The DUP asked for a ruling from the chair as to whether such a task would be appropriate for the Business Committee to meet on. The UKUP stated that it believed

that nearly everyone was coming to the view that the Business Committee would have been able to provide some serious input to the management of this debate. Alliance had suggested this when the topic was raised the previous week. Now the Chairman was asking for some details of plans regarding when new or existing submissions would be handed in to enable a structure to be brought to the debate. The UKUP said it was surely time to review the comments of the participants with regard to the Business Committee being involved in such an exercise. The Chairman asked for other comments.

4. The DUP said that it had made a proposal. Was this now agreed? The Chairman stated that the DUP had asked for a ruling but since there appeared to be no possibility of changing the previous ruling on this, the meeting should proceed on from this. The PUP said that since the last ruling had been given, there had only been two speakers. It therefore saw no reason to raise the issue again at this point. Following an SDLP attempt to raise a point of order by an unelected representative, Alliance said that everyone was present to listen to the parties' positions on decommissioning. This process was only part of the way through so why not let it continue and review the question of Business Committee involvement at a later date. Alliance also recalled that the next day (23rd) could be used to scrutinise parties' submissions on decommissioning, since there was no plenary. It might therefore be helpful if those delegations, who were intent on submitting such documents, could do this today to enable time to be spent profitably on Wednesday.

5. The UUP said it agreed with Alliance's point regarding opening statements. It also said that there could be a need for the Business Committee to meet, perhaps after these had been

concluded. But for the time being the meeting should get on with opening statements. The DUP said that its paper was already in the hands of the Chairmen. The UKUP said that, in response to Alliance's points, it (Alliance) had already had the benefit of the party's opening statement. The SDLP stated that their view on the Business Committee getting involved at this stage was the same as before. There was no work for it to do at present. The DUP said that the Chairman had been seeking logistical assistance by his earlier remarks. The Business Committee was established to take such a role on, but it wasn't being given a chance. The DUP asked what was behind this situation and who was stopping the Business Committee from meeting?

6. Alliance said the current issue did not require a meeting of the Business Committee to sort out. The point raised by the Chairman concerned the submission of other papers. The Chairman had not talked about which parties had submitted papers. There was no need to engage the Business Committee to tell everybody about parties submitting papers. Once the end of the opening statements had been reached, then this might be an appropriate time to review the involvement of the Business Committee, but to date, the debate had only heard two verbal statements and received three written submissions. Alliance said this part of the debate should continue on and if there were substantive main issues at the end, then that might be the time to engage the Business Committee. The DUP said that the Chairman had also asked how to proceed as well as attempting to gain information on potential documents etc. This aspect was for the Business Committee to determine and that was why it had been brought into being. The issue of managing the process was why the Business Committee had been established. The UKUP agreed with the DUP comments. It said it couldn't understand why there was a problem, although when it

recalled the British Government's support for the SDLP's view on the involvement of the Business Committee the previous week, perhaps the present situation wasn't altogether surprising. The UKUP said it was rather sad that a Business Committee which posed no threat to anyone was being opposed by some. The UKUP stated that the proposal for a lunch-time meeting could in effect have been an ad hoc meeting of the Business Committee.

7. The DUP said it was quite surprised by the present state of affairs. The Business Committee was an idea which had come from the two Governments. The SDLP had said previously it didn't want one, but yet it was also saying to unionists to get on with the talks. The DUP said now was the appropriate time for a Business Committee to meet, particularly if there were such issues as the proceedings of the debate, when should votes would be taken etc. The Chairman referred to the official record of 15 October and stated that it had been decided then that a Business Committee meeting wasn't required at that point. The Chairman emphasised that he had been interested in getting an idea of the structure of the debate in order to assist participants. This, he said, was not an indication of seeking to use the Business Committee. It was simply a matter of prime interest to him and, he believed, to the participants, to obtain such a view today. The DUP said it wished to make a proposal. The Chairman said there was already a formal proposal on the table from the party, seconded by the UKUP. He then asked for a vote on this. In favour of the original DUP proposal to involve the Business Committee at this point were DUP and UKUP. Those against were Alliance, Labour, NIWC, PUP, SDLP and UDP.

8. The UUP asked whether it could put forward a proposal for the Business Committee to meet at the end of the opening statements in

the debate. The Chairman confirmed that the earlier DUP proposal had not been agreed. The DUP referred to the new UUP proposal. The UUP restated this. Alliance said that the UUP proposal appeared sensible in that it seemed right to review the involvement of the Business Committee at the end of this item of business. It didn't, however, believe it made sense to pre-determine a Business Committee meeting. Alliance said that rather than hear more of the DUP address on decommissioning, the process had now spent 30 minutes on procedures. It looked as if the last two weeks would only have two speakers addressing decommissioning. It was therefore necessary to get on with the substantive business and not get side-tracked on procedures. The UUP then stated that it was content to give notice to the chair that the Business Committee would need to meet after the opening statements had been concluded. It thought this was a sensible approach and would therefore put this proposal forward at that stage.

9. Alliance suggested that the UUP proposal be put on the table now. The Chairman sought clarification from the UUP on its proposal. The DUP then said that the UUP had made a proposal but now were only giving notice of it. Did this not mean that it was withdrawing it for the present? This was acknowledged by the UUP. The DUP said it now wished to propose that the Business Committee be withdrawn from the process. There was clearly no point in having a Business Committee when discussions could be held privately with the Chairman on matters of proceedings.

10. Alliance queried whether the DUP proposal was a competent one. The Business Committee was an integral part of the rules of procedure. The proposal was therefore seeking to amend the rules of procedure. The DUP asked the Chairman whether he wished to rule on the Alliance point. It also pointed out the contents of

rule two, which contained the fact that any change to the rules needed to be considered by the Business Committee! The Chairman stated that the question raised by the DUP had to be ruled on, not only by the Chairman, but also by a plenary meeting. The DUP said that as the actual proposal was to disband the Business Committee, there then had to be a meeting of the Business Committee first, to enable it to consider the proposal. At this point the Chairman called an adjournment at 10.45 for 20 minutes.

Independent Chairmen Notetakers
25 October 1996

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