

NORTHERN IRELAND WOMEN'S COALITION RESPONSE TO THE UK UNIONIST MOTION ON DECOMMISSIONING

1. It is important that we clarify the nature of Mr. McCartney's motion. The motion itself is in the first paragraph, with the subsequent clauses (a) to (f) being subparagraphs governing and setting down conditions for the application of the motion. The substantive motion itself deals with two issues and action to force a position on these two issues. The two issues are 1) inviting entry into the Talks and 2) putting participants out of the Talks. The action is to galvanise parties to unite to threaten those charged with exercising responsibility in these areas, the threat being a collective walk-out.
2. The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition takes great exception to the UKU motion. I quote "the parties presently participating in the Talks will not continue..." if certain things happen. What right has Mr. McCartney to attempt to impose on other parties a decision on whether they shall participate or not? And what effect would such a motion have if it was passed? Mr McCartney cannot determine the participation policy of the Women's Coalition, or of any other party round this table, simply by the wave of a wand, or the wave of a big stick or the passing of a motion.
3. The UKU motion seeks to determine the conditions for invitation to participate in the Talks. The UKU is not entitled to do this. It is the responsibility of the Secretary of State to determine entry to these Talks as laid out in paragraph 2 of the Northern Ireland Entry to Negotiations Act 1996. The Secretary of State has pointed out on several occasions that this matter rests, and must rest, solely with him; and that he will not leave himself open to legal challenge by having the terms for such invitation set down by any other body including this plenary.
4. The UKU motion seeks to determine the conditions for excluding participants from the Talks. The UKU is not entitled to do this. As laid out in paragraph 29 of the Rules of Procedure, it is the responsibility of both Governments to take appropriate action, having due regard to the views of the participants, on representation that a participant has demonstrably dishonoured the principles of democracy and non-violence. You will also note that the UKU's proposal seeks to reduce "appropriate action" to the sole action of excluding participants.
5. The UKU motion seeks to determine the policy of each and every independent party here in regard to participation in these Talks and to bind them to a course of action. The UKU is not entitled to do this. Every party will, no doubt, speak for itself. I want to make clear that only the Women's Coalition will determine the basis of its participation. ~~Neither you Mr McCartney or any other person will dictate to us.~~ Thus even if the motion is allowed to stand and is passed, it is meaningless.

6. The UKU motion seeks to overturn both the founding legislation of the Talks determined by Parliament and the Rules of Procedure democratically decided by ourselves in long, arduous debate before the Summer. That the motion totally contradicts the Mitchell Report conclusions arrived at after wide-ranging independent consultation goes without saying. For a party which ^{emphasises} ~~harps on~~ about "fundamental principles of democratic procedure" the UKU motion seeks to overturn democratic decisions. The UKU obviously does not believe in democracy in its myriad forms; not even in those forms of democracy which led us to where we are now - consultation by an international independent body, parliamentary decision on the Talks and plenary decision on our operating rules.

7. Let there be no mistake about the Women's Coalition's view. We believe that there must be clear acceptance by any relevant party that progress towards a settlement or agreement must be founded solely upon democratic procedure (UKU sub-paragraph (d)). We do not find this incompatible with parallel decommissioning. We believe that only crude thinkers read this as arms for political progress.

8. We are coming to the inescapable conclusion that what frightens some of the political parties ~~opposite~~ is that there might be a cease-fire, that there might be agreement on a decommissioning process and that they will have to negotiate with their **political** enemy.

9. The NI Women's Coalition wishes to see effective decommissioning realised. We also wish to see meaningful and inclusive negotiations addressing legitimate concerns and new political arrangements with which all can identify. We have seen precious little evidence of this. It would appear that some political parties ~~opposite~~ - those who continually speechify, ~~hold up the process~~, try to entrap others - have little real content, little skill and most importantly little appetite for the **political** task. The Irish News poll was spot on; there is little faith in our political parties to deliver - not "their" solution but an "accommodation"; little faith in our ability to give historic leadership and to make an historic gesture to reach an historic compromise with which we can all live.

10. We have only two suggestions to make to the UKU and to any other party which supports their approach: 1) ~~grow up and~~ stop playing clever word games with motions and 2) ^{to} face reality both in political compromise and in ridding our society of arms.

11. We were going ^{to} ~~to~~ amend this motion Chairman. ~~(We can play these drafting games too)~~ Our amendment would be ^{to} delete all except the first part of sub-paragraph (d) "There must be a clear acceptance by any relevant party that progress towards a settlement or agreement must be founded solely upon democratic procedure".

12. But given our interpretation of the import of the actual motion as contained in the substantive paragraph we must ask you to rule the motion out of order on the following basis. It 1) contradicts previous decisions already arrived at by legislation and by decision of this body and 2) cannot be given effect as neither the UKU nor this body can mandate the policy of independent political parties.