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Northern Ireland Negotiations

STRAND ONE, FIFTH MEETING
3 NOVEMBER 1997

Minutes

1. The fifth meeting of Strand One commenced at 11.00 am on 3 November, with Mr Murphy in the Chair and the Alliance Party, Labour, NIWC, PUP, Sinn Fein, SDLP, UDP and UUP all present.
2. At the request of the UUP, discussion of the minutes of the 27 October meeting was deferred to the following meeting.
3. **Mr Murphy** suggested that parties give introductory remarks on items 3 and 4 of the agenda and then discussion could focus in greater detail on these items, perhaps working through items A to I of the Government's paper.
4. **The NIWC** said that they believed any new arrangements needed to have clear lines of relationship with Strand Two and Three structures, adding that it would also be important for the Cross-Border Liaison Sub-Committee of the Assembly to have a link with North/South structures and the Westminster Special Standing Committee on Northern Ireland. **The PUP** criticised the format of the Talks saying that it was very difficult to discuss the issues in abstract.
5. **Sinn Fein** also agreed that the debate was somewhat artificial citing the unwillingness of one other party to engage in discussion with them as an example. They agreed that the current format was awkward; their preferred option was to go through the agenda and then to look at how to move forward, the Review Plenary possibly providing a suitable opportunity to consider this. **Sinn Fein** added that they thought that sovereignty was the key to Strand One discussions. Their own aspiration was a 32 county Ireland and their Strand One paper had therefore been framed in that context.

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6. **The SDLP** commented that it was difficult to present proposals for item 4 given that the submissions to date had been sparse in number and content. They wished to put on record the importance of all three Strands, recognising that all parties placed different emphases on these. They stressed that it would not be possible to arrive at an agreed outcome if Strand Two were treated as an addendum to either Strand One or Strand Three. **The SDLP** wanted arrangements in all the three Strands to be both effective and dynamic.

7. **The UDP** said that they believed that relationships within Northern Ireland would form the corner-stone of any agreed outcome. They wanted a friendly and co-operative relationship with the Republic of Ireland but without any inappropriate interference in the internal affairs of Northern Ireland. The **UDP** set great store on Strand One but recognised that others, particularly nationalists, put greater emphasis on Strand Two. They saw the current key challenge as being to find a compromise approach to reconcile these opposing positions.

8. **The UUP** referred to the Rules of Procedure stating that the types of relationship to be covered within Strand One were those within Northern Ireland and between any Northern Ireland institutions and the Westminster Parliament. They commented that it was hard to discuss this before any decision had been taken as to whether or not to have a body or Assembly within Northern Ireland. They indicated that they believed the main substance of the Talks would be found Strands 2 and 3 and that they were happy to see time blocked out to deal with these fully. If it were assumed that some sort of body would be part of the agreed outcome, they believed it was important to consider the relationship between that body and Westminster (which they felt would, in part, be dependent on whether or not there was a legislative role for the devolved body), the European Union and other Regions within the United Kingdom and the rest of Western Europe.

9. **The Alliance Party** stated that they had nothing further to add to their comments made at the previous meeting. **Labour** explained that they had not tabled a paper on item 4; the relevant issues had been covered in their item 3 paper. They also questioned the utility of the current format suggesting that a smaller format might be more appropriate.

10. **Mr Murphy** commented on the British Government paper which, as he explained, had assumed that there would be an Assembly in Northern Ireland as well as North/South bodies and significant East/West arrangements. He asked whether participants would like to continue the discussion on items 3 and 4, commenting that if they did it would be important that discussion went into more detail than it had to date, or whether as an alternative they would prefer to move on to items 5 and 6 (justice, and rights and safeguards).

11. **Sinn Fein** said that they would prefer to move on. They indicated that they were willing to provide papers and suggested that it should be possible to manage items 5 and 6 in a single meeting. **Labour** also indicated that they would support moving on at this juncture. **The UUP**, however, said that they found it very hard to proceed without first agreeing a starting point. **The Alliance Party** commented that they did not feel that there was real engagement in the process at present, adding that they did not believe any one party was to blame, rather that participants were reluctant to get into detailed discussion. They had no objection to convening in other formats if this would prove more productive.

12. **The SDLP** indicated their frustration at the lack of progress to date. They commented that, in their belief, the two Governments had the ultimate decision regarding the format of the Talks and therefore had the power to jump-start the process. They suggested that the Government meet the parties (and indicated they would suggest the same to Senator Mitchell with regard to Strand Two) to seek their views on alternative formats and how best to crystallise ideas.

13. **The PUP** agreed that an adjournment for the Government to consult the parties would be helpful. Their view was that the format was wrong and it was therefore important to get through items 5 and 6 quickly and then move into a new format which might be more conducive to progress. They stressed that this was not an attempt to create exclusive Talks, rather a more intimate setting, less formal, in the hope of producing real dialogue.

14. Summing up, **Mr Murphy**:

- (a) invited participants to table papers on items 5 and 6 by no later than 10.00 am on Monday 10 November;
- (b) announced the next meeting of Strand One for 2.00 pm on Monday 10 November; and
- (c) indicated that, in the meantime, he would consult with parties on the revised format for discussions.

15. **Sinn Fein** indicated that they would like fuller minutes of Strand One meetings. **The UUP** commented that it had already been agreed that short minutes would be appropriate. **Mr Murphy** agreed to look into this.

Strand One Secretariat