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SUMMARY RECORD OF STRAND TWO MEETING - TUESDAY 27 JANUARY 1998 AT 1441 - LANCASTER HOUSE, LONDON

CHAIRMEN:

Senator Mitchell
Mr Holkeri

THOSE PRESENT:

British Government
Irish Government

Alliance
Labour
Northern Ireland Women's Coalition
Progressive Unionist Party
Sinn Féin
Social Democratic and Labour Party
Ulster Unionist Party

1. The Chairman convened the meeting at 1441 and stated that each participant now had a copy of the joint Government paper "Strand Two: North/South structures" - comprising six paragraphs and 14 questions. The Chairman said he wished to propose that this session continue until around 1700 and tomorrow morning's session occur between 1000-1300 to enable a full discussion of the paper to take place. He reminded participants that a Strand Three Liaison meeting was also scheduled for the following day and was likely to begin around 1400. The Chairman proposed, as a means of starting the discussion, that both Governments offer any additional views before moving to a tour de table for general, uninterrupted comments. Following this he proposed to go to the specific questions (a) - (g) and seek responses to these, from the participants thereby leaving questions (h) - (n) for tomorrow morning. Hearing no objections the Chairman asked the British Government to proceed.

2. The UUP intervened to state that the document had taken both Governments a week to prepare and it had only been distributed to some of the parties an hour before the meeting. The UUP said that while it would provide initial comments, as requested by the Chair, these might not necessarily represent its considered view of the issues. Furthermore the party stated that there had been insufficient time to consider the paper in any detail in a group format or bilateral meeting. The Chairman said he understood the UUP's position and pointed out that participants might well want to return to the paper at a later stage depending on the comments presented at the meeting. The Chairman said he would therefore propose a further process of discussion which took account of any developments in this session. The Chairman then asked the Irish Government for comment.

3. The Irish Government said both Governments had prepared a joint paper to facilitate discussion on the matters requiring consideration in connection with the establishment of North/South structures as part of an overall settlement. This exercise had been undertaken following last week's initial debate on the "Propositions" paper. The Irish Government apologised that the document had taken longer than anticipated to distribute. Some of this delay had been down to the events of the preceding day and having to consider issues such as the security situation in Northern Ireland and the position of the UDP under Rule 29. In these circumstances it believed it had done its best in making the joint paper available for discussion at this point. The Irish Government said everyone had received the paper entitled North/South structures and also a paper on East/West structures which was intended to aid discussion in the Strand Three Liaison Committee.

4. The Irish Government said the North/South structures paper was designed to stimulate debate and in particular to focus attention on the range

of specific issues which were central to the process's consideration of this crucial area. The introduction set out, in general terms, the context in which the two Governments approached the question. As the paper made clear, the two Governments remained firmly committed to the positions set out in the Joint Declaration and to those in the Framework Document, as being their best assessment of where agreement might be found in the negotiations. The Irish Government said it had also, in the morning debate, once again reiterated the importance it attached to the creation of strong and meaningful North/South structures. In their joint statement on 12 January, both Governments acknowledged that the "Propositions" paper needed to be elucidated in detailed discussion before parties could accept the overall impact of the proposals.

5. The Irish Government said it would welcome the ideas of colleagues around the table, though the final outcome naturally depended on what could be agreed among the participants. A range of matters had been set out for consideration. Some of these were, inevitably, more complex than others and might be harder to resolve. But the Irish Government said it hoped everyone could accept that, irrespective of each participant's preferences, these were the issues which had to be addressed and agreed. There was much to do and the North/South structures paper would hopefully provide a focus for activity. The paper on current North/South co-operation, circulated the previous day, also included an annex listing areas for potential future co-operation. The wide range of matters identified showed just how much there was for everyone to do working together and how much real potential there was for the benefit of all the people of Ireland. That was one major reason to the task ahead. The Irish Government urged everyone to use the remaining time this week to see if the process could make headway in identifying what

could be agreed on, and defining more precisely what it was that remained to be resolved between participants.

6. The British Government said the Irish Government had already covered some of its points but it also wished to apologise for the late distribution of the "Structures" paper. It said part of the difficulties in late distribution was as a result of the Governments negotiating as proxies. The British Government said it was much more valuable to actually have negotiations among the participants. The "Structures" paper was distributed to facilitate debate. There was no point in putting forward the Governments' view on it since much of this material was already in circulation. The British Government said the key point now was the need for all the participants to engage and get down to real discussions themselves and if a schedule of business was drawn up by the Chairman everybody would know exactly what was required in terms of time being allocated for discussion of these issues.

7. Alliance said the structures paper contained no surprises. It also contained no answers, but rather a series of questions and not all the relevant issues were covered by these questions. For example there was no question as to what matters the implementation bodies were set up to deal with. Alliance said the Governments' paper was very structural yet contained little on actual content. It also seemed likely that getting questions from all participants both in this session and the following morning was not going to allow much elaboration or reasoning from each contributor. The Chairman intervened to say that he envisaged further Strand meetings back in Belfast would be needed to fully address the paper. Alliance said there wasn't a lot more time available for batting such documents back and forward if time was still required for actual negotiations. The party said it supported the UUP's initial comments and suggested that it would make preliminary answers

available while reserving its position. Labour referred to paragraphs 24 - 38 of the Framework Document and said it had some reservations about the implementation bodies as well as other questions which it would raise later.

8. The NIWC welcomed the Governments paper. The document raised some strategic and operational issues but the party was pleased that it did address some of the issues mentioned in the "Propositions" paper. The NIWC said it would need further time to consider all this and therefore wished to reserve its position.

9. The PUP said it was pleased to receive the document. Whether it would be pleased with the content depended on the negotiations between the participants. The PUP referred to the spin already being put on the document at media briefings and the battle which was being fought between participants to ensure that each view was necessarily transmitted to their supporters with a resultant detriment to others. The party said it would reserve judgement on the quality of the paper but it did expect that the questions asked in it would kick-start the process of negotiation. With regard to the Framework Document's references in the "Structures" paper, the PUP said the Governments owned the paper, the participants didn't, so they could put in it what they wished. The party, however would not support the proposals in the Framework Document and doubted whether any other pro-union party would do likewise. The party said it had much more to say on North/South structures at a later point and cautioned against participants putting spins on the paper which weren't necessary.

10. Sinn Féin welcomed the opportunity to hold a discussion on the paper since such a opportunity needed to be grasped now more than ever. On this the party said it was very disturbed by the latest statement from the LVF

which suggested that the assassinations of nationalists would continue was a serious and worrying development. Sinn Féin said its view had been that the discussion needed to address an inclusive and comprehensive agenda covering all of the issues to be resolved, with parity across and between the three strands of the negotiations.

11. Sinn Féin said the broad issues which needed to be addressed, if the causes of conflict were to be removed and a lasting peace settlement found, were sovereignty and constitutional issues, demilitarisation, including the release of prisoners and the creation of a normal and acceptable policing service, the equality agenda, encompassing rights, safeguards and justice, issues and new political arrangements and structures. New arrangements, their powers, scope, responsibilities and dynamic would occupy the minds of many of the participants, yet everyone should remember that this process was not about institutions alone, but about creating a new and democratic agreement. A democratic peace settlement needed to include; the release of political prisoners, the replacement of the RUC with a normal policing service and equality for all the people.

12. Sinn Féin said demilitarisation and the equality agenda could and should be acted on immediately. It was in this context that it had earlier argued for a comprehensive paper from the two Governments, addressing all-Ireland arrangements in a detailed manner. It was the party's long held view that the two Governments needed to lead this process and their agreed positions on these matters were of vital importance in moving forward. The negotiations needed to build on and develop those positions already agreed between the two Governments. For its part Sinn Féin said it believed that new arrangements should, in the best interests of all the people of Ireland, aim to advance a process of national unity and reconciliation, underpin

political democracy and recognise fully the diversity as well as the unity of the people of Ireland.

13. To aid such discussion, Sinn Féin said it was submitting a paper giving further details of its proposals for regional Councils. It said it wanted to hear the views of other participants and to discuss their proposals. It particularly wanted to hear the agreed positions of the two Governments on the questions it had posed to the other participants since it believed that the two Governments should lead this process and inject momentum into it. Sinn Féin said it noted the fact that the two Governments had agreed a paper and the they had restated their commitment to already agreed positions. The Governments needed to build on and develop these positions. Sinn Féin said it would hope shortly to see a comprehensive document which outlined the joint governments position on their own questions and which also dealt with other questions which others wished to raise. For example was it the opinion of the two Governments that the proposed North/South Body would have executive, harmonising and consultative powers? Would it be directly responsible for policy making and the implementation of policy, would the two Governments designate initially the range of areas over which the all-Ireland body would have powers and responsibility and what would those issues be? What mechanisms did the two Governments envisage to overcome obstruction or non-participation in the body, would participation in the body be obligatory, and would it be a stand alone body with the dynamic ability to grow and develop?

14. Sinn Féin said while it would not expect answers from the two Governments today, it would expect that these questions be addressed in their next paper. The party said it would appreciate hearing from the

Governments when they hoped to table a more detailed paper along the lines suggested by it.

15. The SDLP welcomed the joint Government paper and believed it should concentrate everyone's minds on all the relevant issues which was why everyone was present. The party said it believed everyone's fears and anxieties were well covered in the "Structures" paper. It was of course important to remember that the proposals had to be agreed among the participants and the powers flowing from any proposals also had to be exercised by agreement. The process at its base level was about working together to build trust and overcome fear, suspicion, mistrust, and alienation. The SDLP said it hoped that it would prove possible to discuss the paper now with the other participants in the Strand Two format and in bilaterals, if appropriate.

16. The UUP said the first sentence of the "Structures" paper was misleading. There was no range of structures in the document. The party had asked the previous week for a paper from the Governments setting out a range of options for structures. This clearly hadn't occurred, yet the British Government had made reference in media comment last week to a structures paper. The party said that it might well have been the case that some of the other participants would have welcomed such options; others perhaps would not, but the paper produced was not what was asked for. The SDLP intervened to say that it had been agreed at the previous week's Strand Two meeting, without comment, that the two Governments would produce a discussion paper for the next session.

17. The UUP asked why then had the British Government, during exchanges with the media, referred to a "Structures" paper? The party said it

wished to see options for structures and the reasons lying behind the need for North/South bodies. With regard to the previously circulated paper on "cooperation", the UUP said all this activity was continuing to take place yet the priority of the two Governments seemed not to be focused on getting new institutions in place to formalise such co-operation but rather to take forward the much wider political objectives involved.

18. The UUP referred to the assertions in the "Structures" paper that both Governments remained firmly committed to their positions in the Joint Declaration and those set out in the Framework Document. The party said it had consistently opposed the models outlined in the Framework Document for North/South bodies. The party was prepared to consider all the issues and to look at various models but the model supported by the Government was not and never could be a proposition which the UUP could sanction. The party said it fully understood why the representatives of Irish nationalists felt they required some form of institution which gave them an opportunity to give expression to their political identity but what was the dividing line between the opportunity for this expression and the right and ability of unionists to express their right of consent to be part of the United Kingdom? This was the real issue which had to be addressed in the process.

19. The UUP said it was glad that such an important issue had been aired at this stage since it was a fundamental aspect of the talks process and would have to be fully addressed before any settlement was reached. The party again said that the model as supported by the Governments in the Framework Document could not be commended by it. The party said everyone had to remember that some 40% of the unionist electorate had already absented itself from the process. This section of unionism had clearly spelt out its opposition to the Framework Document on numerous occasions

to both Governments. Furthermore the PUP had earlier confirmed its refusal to accept the models in the Framework Document and while the UDP was presently absent from the process, the UUP said it could only presume that that party would articulate a similar position. There was therefore no support from any of the pro-union parties for the Governments' model because it crossed the delicate line dividing the two aspirations outlined earlier.

20. The UUP, in referring to the Strand Three paper also circulated said it had always viewed such issues as cross strand in nature. The references in the paper to paragraphs 39 -49 of the Framework Document could not be supported. The party said it was also on the record, on numerous occasions, as saying that the Framework Document's treatment of East/West relationships was insulting. The UUP said it had gone along with the "Propositions" paper since it opened up the debate on issues which were consistent with European models. But those now referred to in both the Strand Two and Strand Three papers could not be commended to supporters of unionism.

21. The UUP, moving on, said it had been treated on frequent occasions to lectures from Sinn Féin about engaging with the latter as a means of signifying that real and full negotiations were occurring. The party said it wanted to make it clear that Sinn Féin had not given the unionist community any recognition whatsoever of its rights. In Sinn Féin's eyes, the unionist community was merely a blot on the landscape to be driven into the sea. There was no recognition of the right of consent. In fact this had been repudiated by Sinn Féin on a number of occasions. The real engagement, in which other ordinary political parties sought to address the range of problems, had originally brought about Sinn Féin's non-participation since it was anything other than an ordinary political party. Now the process wished to

keep this artificiality alive by bringing Sinn Féin in and suggesting to others that the latter was, like every other participant, interested in "blocked drains and leaky roofs". This was a complete myth. The UUP said the reality of the situation was that half the members of the IRA's Army Council were present at the table and its experience of engagement with Sinn Féin/IRA had been the assassination of Rev Robert Bradford MP, Assemblyman Edgar Graham and numerous Councillors and representatives up and down the country.

22. The UUP continued saying that it thought at some point since entering the process, Sinn Féin would have recognised the basic rights of unionists. The party had thought it was giving recognition to Sinn Féin by remaining in it when the latter entered the process. But Sinn Féin said no to the principle of consent and no to decommissioning all on the first day. Furthermore Sinn Féin had yet to produce any confidence building measures aimed at the unionist community and one of its members towards the end of last year had gone to Cullyhanna and stated that republicans would go back to what they knew best if they failed to achieve what they wanted from the talks process. What sort of confidence building measure was this? The same organisation hadn't made it clear, on the previous day, whether it wished to see the UDP out of the talks or not, but instead had left it to the two Governments to decide.

23. The UUP said all this play acting had been going on so that a bilateral meeting between the Sinn Féin President and its party leader would be viewed as the catalyst to change all of this. The basic fact of the matter was that there was no point in holding a bilateral when Sinn Féin was clearly committed to a republican agenda which gave no recognition at all to the position of the UUP or the pro-union people. It was perfectly satisfactory for Sinn Féin to say it wished to pursue democratic politics but the difficulty for

the UUP was that there was simply no evidence to date of any movement from Sinn Féin to address the key issues and show commitment to these. The UUP continued to refer to the issue of engagement with Sinn Féin and the latter's view that such engagement had to occur or the process would achieve nothing. The party asked how could one engage with Sinn Féin when it had now tabled a proposal for a number of regional Councils in Ireland - a proposal which was totally unrealistic, which showed absolutely no movement from the base republican position and a proposal which would accrue little, if any support, around the table.

24. The UUP said this proposal seemed to reinforce its view that Sinn Féin was engaged in a phase of the overall struggle and when this was exhausted and whatever was extracted from the current process, a new phase would begin. This was not evidence of a commitment to work towards an agreed settlement. The UUP said it was at the talks to achieve a settlement and a conclusion to a long running dispute, not to be part of a transitional phase where that dispute continued. The UUP said that like everyone else, it had no idea what the future might hold but the important point was that it was fully committed to finding a settlement which the present generation could support.

25. The UUP said it fully realised the sacrifices that had been made on the republican side when particular objectives had been pursued and the grief and suffering that those communities had suffered, particularly during the period of the hunger strikes, when many families and relatives had buried their loved ones in such tragic circumstances. The party said it also fully recognised Sinn Féin's position that if their political objectives fell short, then this was a major problem for them in terms of their electorate. At the end of the day, the UUP said, there had to be a degree of realism injected into current thinking. None of the participants was of any value to the process

unless it could deliver its own supporters behind a solution. In particular the party said that Sinn Féin had to be very mindful of this realism yet there still seemed to be a belief held by some in the process that if one could produce a solution which nationalists and Irish Government supported and the British Government went along with, then this could be shoved down the throats of the unionist community. The UUP said if this was the case it was the road to no town. Of course everyone had made mistakes in the past and if the participants were starting now from a clean sheet of paper then matters might be different with the components of an agreement only covering one page. But they weren't and it remained clear that the models in the Framework Document and the proposal from Sinn Féin would not receive the support of the unionist electorate.

26. Sinn Féin said it wasn't present to drive anyone into the sea. It respected the UUP's opinion but disagreed with its views. Sinn Féin said unionism was hurting because it was afraid of the future. Unionists knew that, over the last 70 years, nationalists and republicans had lived in fear, discrimination and domination. This had to be brought to an end but in turn this meant bringing everybody in to find an agreed solution. Sinn Féin said it could spend all day outlining the grievances of the people it represented and perhaps independent observers might well assess and appreciate the hurt inflicted on that community. But there were always going to be struggles with this position and over a period people on both sides would end up being hurt. That was why everyone involved in the present process had to do something different from the past, otherwise they were not fulfilling their functions as political leaders. Sinn Féin said the difference between it and the UUP was that it was prepared to talk about this change. The party was prepared to talk while at the same time listening to other parties' positions but listening did not preclude the ability to put forward its own proposals.

27. Sinn Féin said the UUP had criticised its proposal for regional Councils, but where were the UUP's proposals? The party said there needed to be real negotiation and real engagement and the best starting point for this was a meeting between its President and the UUP leader. Sinn Féin said it believed there were some in the UUP who recognised this position. The party lived in hope that such engagement would occur. Referring to other UUP comments, Sinn Féin said it recognised the difficulties for it in bringing all its supporters along but the party was prepared to play a genuine part in resolving a conflict in which everyone had suffered. Sinn Féin said the conflict could only be solved by talking. Unionism was at the crossroads and the world was looking at the talks process to see if it was a success or a complete mess. Sinn Féin said it wanted it to be a success but that could only happen if there was meaningful and real engagement. Such engagement would send a message to the community that everything possible was being done to achieve a successful outcome.

28. Alliance contrasted Sinn Féin's closing remarks by saying it thought the whole world was bored with the process. The talks had, in some ways, provided an elaborate means for the participants to speak to each other but to date nothing much had come from this other than the same old messages. It was now late January and time was running out. Alliance said, despite what many were saying that the negotiations were about to start, these were the real negotiations and it wished therefore to provide initial answers to the questions (a) - (g) posed in the joint Government paper on Strand Two: structures:

- (a) Ministerial co-operation and supervision of any North/South agencies.

- (b) Ministers from North and South, though there was a question over membership of summit meetings; the legal basis would be that of Westminster and Dublin.
- (c) role and function of the Council would be similar to (a), categorised by Ministerial department through cross border issues; the role would present an opportunity for Ministers to reach agreement and work towards further progress on issues.
- (d) Council would operate on meetings of Ministers with support from officials. All decisions made by agreement.
- (e) on membership - meetings of relevant Departmental Ministers, normally one to one, sometimes more. On summit meetings the Chief Minister (NI) and Taoiseach to lead with each being accompanied by one or more Ministers. Probably best leave numbers open to allow attendance of those Ministers whose briefs were relevant to topic under discussion.
- (f) by agreement - if there is disagreement then the working of the Council stops. Northern Ireland had a devolved administration so the British Government had the overriding power; therefore the intergovernmental machinery could deal with such a situation with the involvement of a Northern Ireland presence.
- (g) Ministers and Heads of Departments would have to carry the relevant elected bodies with them and, if not, the Council wouldn't have the support of elected bodies.

29. The SDLP said it appreciated the UUP's earlier remarks and said it also assumed that it (the UUP) understood the problems of the people it represented. The party said it very much hoped that it would be possible to get agreement for everyone's sake. The SDLP said there was a lot to be getting on with therefore it seemed reasonable to suggest that each party answer the questions (a) - (g) in writing to enable the common ground to be established and then move forward from there. The Chairman stated that oral and written responses were not mutually exclusive and invited participants to respond in the manner they wished.

30. Labour said it wished to provide preliminary answers to questions (a) - (g).

- (a) a new institutional framework should be established to oversee present and future political, social and economic co-operation North and South.
- (b)& determining functions to be discharged or overseen by the institution
- (c) will need to take account of: (i) common interest in a given matter in both parts of Ireland; (ii) mutual advantage of addressing a matter together; (iii) the mutual benefit to be derived by both parts of Ireland; (iv) effectiveness and efficiency in the discharge of any of its responsibilities.
- (d) there should be no preordained limit to the development of the Council.
- (e) agree a range of matters to be initially discussed by Governments. The Council should develop these over time.
- (f) it should operate on the basis of agreement between both sides.

(g) implementation of these arrangements should be subject to detailed discussion; there should be joint/shared funding between both bodies with its own Secretariat.

31. The NIWC said it would respond in writing but asked when this would be required. The Chairman asked participants for a reasonable deadline. The UUP referred to its opening comments. It said it had no problem with other participants making a contribution at this stage but it hadn't accepted the basis for these most recent joint documents since there appeared to be an overriding political game being played. The UUP said its response might not be confined to answers to the questions and it therefore wished to reserve its position at that time. The Chairman sought comment from the participants as to whether any further verbal responses would be forthcoming. He said he would also accept participants comments in writing to all the questions but a deadline needed to be established.

32. The SDLP said it would begin work immediately on its responses. The Chairman proposed that written responses be provided by Friday 6 February. Such responses could either be in lieu of or a supplement to material already provided. This was agreed. It was also agreed, following a question from Alliance, that participants, if they so wished, could circulate their responses around others. Sinn Féin said it wished to ask both Governments to outline their position on these questions and any questions which parties had raised during the discussions.

33. The British Government said the positions of the Governments on all these questions had been clearly set out on previous occasions. There was no point in having the Governments negotiate as proxies for everyone else. It

would be possible to compare the responses of the parties with the views which the Governments had publicly outlined over the years. The Governments did not want to be substitutes for the parties themselves. The Irish Government agreed with these comments. The broad parameters of the Governments' own best idea of a settlement were set out in existing documents: now they wanted the participants to address these questions. It was up to the parties to make the necessary compromises - the Governments had already given it their best shot. Issues always became politically loaded when the Governments were involved. The Irish Government said it had taken a long time to produce the fairly innocuous document circulated today. The parties could not keep leaving matters to the Governments.

34. The PUP felt that there was a difficulty here, which perhaps could be overcome by progress in Strand One in Belfast. The parties were supposed to be looking at questions of governance. One of the parties, which might have problems in that area, had just put forward proposals which it knew would get no agreement around the table, and was effectively refusing to engage with the other parties. Everybody knew that a solution would involve an Assembly, and that cross border issues were very important, but the process was still at first base on both issues. In Strand One Sinn Féin would not discuss an Assembly; in Strand Two Sinn Féin would not discuss cross border bodies as it did not accept that there would be a border. Sinn Féin was not educating its supporters about what had to come out of the process. The PUP agreed with the Irish Government that the parties were leaving too much to the Governments, and putting them in an invidious position. It also felt there was too much recourse to the Taoiseach and Prime Minister by some parties who tried to take advantage of an inside track. Heads of Government should come in on the final stages of an agreement, not in the detailed discussions. The party did not like the way one of the unionist

parties was using access to the Prime Minister to push its views outside the talks. It would be helpful if both the Taoiseach and Prime Minister could step back and leave matters to the Irish Foreign Minister and Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

35. The SDLP hoped the time for rhetoric was over. It had recognised the strength of commitment in the remarks by the UUP today, and had long accepted the need to reach agreement with the unionist community. Missing from the UUP's comments, which seemed to include a rejection of the "Structures" document, was any set of firm alternative proposals. What was needed now were the responses and views of the parties, not the Governments. The SDLP had set out in some detail its own ideas, for which the touchstone was the Framework Document. The obligation was on the UUP, if it rejected documents on the table, to produce its own proposals. Parties had to be ready to propose, not just reject.

36. Sinn Féin wished to respond to the PUP, which had accused it of refusing to engage while that party (the PUP) refused requests to hold bilateral meetings between them. The PUP was holding to a pact with the UUP not to talk to Sinn Féin. The PUP interjected to deny there was any such pact, and to say that it would have agreed to bilaterals long ago if Sinn Féin had shown any signs of accepting reality. Sinn Féin said the unionist parties had made no proposals whatever about the future, because they were afraid to face a future involving fundamental change. All parties shared a responsibility to resolve the conflict. When the "Propositions" paper had been produced, the leader of the UUP had immediately rushed out to the media to declare dead every other document produced, most of which were very important to other parties. When asked about their views on an Assembly, nationalists would point to Belfast City Council, where nationalist parties were

excluded from real participation by discrimination by the UUP and Alliance. Sinn Féin said it was prepared to face all sorts of realities, including uncomfortable ones. But the party would also like to hear suggestions and ideas from others about the future. The party respected the work in the unionist community of the PUP and others who had engaged in new thinking, but there needed to be real and full engagement between the parties.

37. The SDLP said the "Structures" document was a sensible one. All parties had sensitivities, and whingeing about them was becoming very tiring. Sinn Féin had publicly said the SDLP had accepted a partitionist document in the "Propositions" paper, and that the Irish Government had jointly agreed a pro-unionist document. These were absurd statements, offensive to the sensibilities of the parties concerned, and now the same Governments were being asked to produce yet another paper. The SDLP wanted to hold meetings with the UUP and would do so, and see what emerged. Sinn Féin represented part of the nationalist community. The SDLP said it spoke for the greater part of that community, and wanted to work on the basis of the Governments' paper, while being sensitive to the positions of others. If you kept telling people untruths about the documents you couldn't blame them if, later on, they believed it. The "Structures" paper was not partitionist, it was based on what had been previously agreed between the two Governments. The SDLP would also want to meet Sinn Féin and hear its views about it. The party was looking for new structures to accommodate all traditions, not a new Stormont. It did prefer that its part of Ireland be run by Irish people rather than English, Welsh or Scottish.

38. The PUP said it wished to make a few comments. The party was fed up having to react to media spins put on documents by the UUP, who would get first sight of them from the Prime Minister. The party wanted to be able to

examine documents in their own light, and not under pressure of a media spin. The Governments needed to pull back a bit from their close involvement with some parties. The PUP would endorse much of Sinn Féin's annoyance at the situation inside Belfast City Council, and was trying to help that situation. As had been said before, the outcome of the talks could be written out on a sheet of A4 paper by any of the parties, including Sinn Féin. The problem in getting there was all the sensitivities involved. The PUP said it had originally envisaged the Confidence Building Measures Committee as the place to deal with comfort factors, allowing parties the room to compromise, and where parties could recognise that they needed each other to achieve a saleable outcome. Perhaps there should be a meeting devoted to discussing comfort levels and sensitivities. At present, participants were getting frustrated and so more sensitive. Today's spinning by the SDLP would give the party a lot of work to do in its community. The PUP said it understood why the spinning had been done, but felt it would be better if another way could be found.

39. Alliance rejected the accusations of discrimination in Belfast City Council. The party had engaged in bilaterals with Sinn Féin since 1994, but had been very disappointed with the lack of realistic or constructive proposals it had heard there. Sinn Féin was offering nothing but a United Ireland, which no-one else could engage with. It was very important for Sinn Féin to address issues on the basis of realistic engagement.

40. The NIWC said, despite some acrimony, the discussion had been useful. Everyone had said they wanted the shadow boxing to stop and real discussions to begin. The party would very much support serious attempts by the parties to talk to each other, away from the glare of the cameras. Since it seemed impossible to lock everyone away, spinning would continue, but

parties responding publicly to developments were upping the ante for everyone else. The simultaneous distribution of today's paper by the Governments had been a helpful change. It was now over to the parties, who had the ability to answer the questions posed. If some elements of today's paper were troublesome, parties could still answer the questions in the context of the "Propositions" paper. Returning to the status quo was not an option. The NIWC said there was a positive message from today: the Governments had worked hard, produced a paper, and were looking for responses from the parties.

41. The PUP said there was no point producing documents that wouldn't get off the ground. The actual preference of many people would be for complete integration with Great Britain, but it accepted that this would not be obtainable and would look at alternatives such as an Assembly. Similarly, a United Ireland was not achievable now, in this generation, so everyone should be looking at a devolved administration, which all sides accepted had to be based on a sharing of responsibility. There was going to be an Assembly, and North/South bodies.

42. The SDLP said it had been criticised today for spinning. The party had said nothing today it had not said before, about the "Propositions" paper and others, and had been responding to questions put it as a result of media spins by others. The party tried to refrain from this as much as possible, and was certainly more spinned against than spinning. Like other documents, today's paper was not the final word. What counted was what was negotiated. The point of engagement was mutual adjustment, but everyone was afraid of the same thing: being trapped and abandoned as the ultimate minority. Labour said parties were fed up with a Sinn Féin - UUP dogfight at every meeting. A United Ireland could not be achieved at the moment, however much Sinn

Féin - and indeed others - might desire it. If the parties could reach agreement and put it to the people, it would be the responsibility of the people to accept or reject it.

43. Sinn Féin said it was not engaged in rhetoric. The party did want to see a 32 county State, and its supporters had no interest in an Assembly. If unionists wanted to talk about an Assembly, they should lead by example in existing bodies where they held power. Other parties had said what would and would not be in an agreement, but nothing was preordained.

44. The Chairman brought the meeting to an end. He stated that Strand Two would resume at 1000 tomorrow, 28 January, and hoped participants would be prepared to make direct comments on the questions posed. Parties had pressed the Governments for a paper and then given it very little discussion today. The meeting tomorrow would adjourn not later than 1300, and a Strand Three Liaison meeting would begin at 1400. Strand Two would meet again in Belfast on Tuesday 10 February at 1000. Those parties who wished should submit written responses to the questions by noon on Friday 6 February. The meeting was adjourned at 1705.

**Independent Chairmen Notetakers
5 February 1998**