

Northern Ireland Women's Coalition response to a paper to facilitate discussion presented by the British and Irish Governments on 27th January, 1998

The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition welcomes the statement of the government commitment to the Framework for Agreement where their views are clearly set out in paragraphs 24-38. NI Women's Coalition welcomes the opportunity to elaborate on these proposals:

- a) The broad purposes of North/South structures are identified as follows:
to develop synergies of common interest and strategic planning around economic, social, cultural and equity areas of concern.
- * To provide a framework for the building of trust and the breakdown of barriers between communities North and South.
 - * To enhance and consolidate existing cultural, social, economic and community linkages.
 - * To remedy the current deficiencies in cross-border infrastructure linkages to enable effective cross-border communications between North and South.
 - * To develop the potential contribution of and interchange between civil society both North and South of the border.
- b) The North/South Ministerial Conference (council) should bring together the heads of department, civil servants and ministers representing both the Irish Government and the new Northern Ireland Assembly to discharge and oversee delegated executive, harmonising or consultative functions as are agreed as an integral part of any settlement. Both civil servants and elected politicians involved should be under a duty of service to ensure such delegated powers are carried out on a satisfactory basis.
- c) The main function of the council should be to oversee a range of functionally related subsidiary bodies or other entities established to administer designated functions on an all-island or cross-border basis.
- d) The subsidiary bodies should be agreed as part of the Talks process and then relevant heads of department/ministers should meet on a bilateral basis to oversee their 'family' of agencies.
- e) Membership of the council should be relevant ministers which support networks of relevant civil servants.
- f) The subsidiary bodies should take day-to-day decisions within the terms of the delegated decision-making when the issues involved go outside this framework then the matter should be for discussion by the relevant ministers and advice should be forthcoming from the Dail and the Northern Ireland Assembly.
- g) With regard to guidance of the implementation bodies this should be offered on a regular basis by the North/South Ministerial Council. However, an annual meeting of the

Dail and the Northern Ireland Assembly should be held to offer focused support for the strategic development of cross-border initiatives. In addition to the above any new bodies should be transparent with regard to the implementation of their functions. Annual reports should be published and widely disseminated. It is assumed that the respective ministers involved would also have a responsibility to keep their respective administrations/assemblies informed of the work of their subsidiary bodies.

h) There is an overlap between this question and that of (g). An agreed range of implementation bodies should be established as part of the current Talks process depending on the growth of co-operation and for devolved powers to a Northern Ireland Assembly either the Dail/Northern Ireland Assembly annual meeting or the joint British and Irish Governments should be able to suggest new areas of all-island implementation over time.

The accountability of the implementation within agencies might well be finally guaranteed by the voting of their budget by the British and Irish Governments or by the meeting of the joint Dail/Northern Ireland Assembly. We would prefer the latter.

i) The British and Irish Intergovernmental Council would largely be responsible for non-devolved areas of responsibility. It might well have an overseeing role on the effectiveness of the North/South Ministerial Council and its respective agencies. The Intergovernmental Council might well have a policing role in relation to any reported breach in the duty of service of ministers to make the North/South Ministerial Council to operate in practice.

The Intergovernmental Council might well decide to devolve to the North/South Ministerial Council the task of elaborating a common chapter of the EU Structural Funds to plan an effective EU cross-border dimension. This should be implemented on a joint-strategic basis rather than on a back to back approach.

j) Funding should be made available from the British and Irish Governments in consultation with the European Union.

k) It is felt that the main administration support will be required by the all-Ireland subsidiary bodies and that existing North/South civil service should have a duty of service to provide support to the North/South Council.

l) This is already envisaged as occurring on an annual basis with the possibility of ongoing joint working committees of the Dail and Northern Ireland Assembly to offer advice in both the areas of work covered by the all-Ireland subsidiary bodies, and indeed such other areas that the Dail/Northern Ireland Assembly meeting may deem to be important

OTHER NOTES

5) We must safeguard and extend the concept of dual citizenship under Strand 2.

6) We are disappointed with the restricted list of examples of cross-border co-operation listed by the governments on Monday and feel that there are many other examples currently in operation that could be developed as indicated in Arts.32 and 33 of the Framework Document.