

LIAISON SUB-COMMITTEE ON CONFIDENCE BUILDING MEASURES:
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PARAMILITARY ACTIVITY: PAPER BY HMG

The British Government has repeatedly endorsed the view of the International Body that building confidence is a crucial part of this process. The progress being made in the Talks needs to be underpinned by greater confidence in the community. The Government will play its full part in that.

2. However, building confidence through the cessation of **paramilitary activity** is not within the Government's control. The appalling bomb attacks at Moira and Portadown are a stark reminder of the wanton damage the paramilitaries can inflict on the community for their own twisted reasons. They will not advance by one millimetre the cause of those who carried them out.

3. Maintaining the rule of law is vital in a just society where all should have equal rights and equal responsibilities - and that equality must extend not only to the powerful but also to the weak, and to those living in fear of paramilitary gangs and the violent and often barbaric methods they use to impose their will. The recent efforts of FAIT and other groups have highlighted the increasing number of so-called **punishment shootings and beatings**. The horrendous damage inflicted during these attacks can leave lasting physical and psychological scars on the victims and their families, and on society in general; and are, rightly, condemned throughout the civilised world.

4. In the 30 weeks since the IRA ceasefire on 20 July 1997, there have been **109 further victims** of these hideous attacks, **42** already this year. While it is difficult to be categorical in attributing blame for these attacks, Republican gangs are thought

to have been responsible for 49 attacks, while 60 are believed to have been carried out by loyalists. There have been more than **800** victims of paramilitary assaults and shootings in the last three years.

5. The principles of democracy and non-violence, to which all participants in these Talks must subscribe, require a total and absolute commitment to urge that (so-called) punishment attacks stop, and to take effective steps to prevent such actions. The Government attaches the highest importance to this commitment. The RUC - who will continue to pursue and bring to justice those responsible for such attacks - are the only lawful law-enforcement agency in Northern Ireland, and it is to the police that communities must turn for protection and the maintenance of law and order. These evil attacks, which have been inflicted upon victims on both sides of the community, contravene all concepts of justice, due process and human rights, and have no place in the civilised and stable society we are all trying to build.

6. The Government also firmly supports calls for information to be given to the families and relatives of "**the disappeared**" - those who are presumed to have been murdered by terrorists, but whose bodies have never been recovered. The families of Robert Nairac, Jean McConville, Brian McKinney, and many others continue to mourn the disappearance of their loved ones, without being able to give them a decent and dignified funeral. The time is long overdue for those with the necessary information to make it available. The confidence this would build throughout the community would greatly increase the belief that paramilitaries, on both sides, were sincere in wishing to contribute to ending the sorrow and distress of recent years.

7. Like the vast majority of people in Northern Ireland, the Government also believes it is inexcusable that individuals should be **coerced into leaving Northern Ireland** by threats to their personal safety. Such behaviour is wholly unacceptable and alien to principles of democracy and justice. This Government calls on all those who have influence over, or contact with, organisations who have made such threats

to do all they can to ensure that those expelled are free to return unmolested to their families and homes and resume their lives in safety; so that they too can enjoy the fruits of the peaceful settlement for which we should all be working.

8. The confidence building measures referred to in the International Body's Report also include the termination of **targeting and surveillance**, which are activities associated with paramilitary groups maintaining a readiness to return to violence. The Government has consistently made clear that such activity is wrong in itself and inconsistent with a declared commitment to exclusively peaceful methods. For confidence to be built there must be a thoroughgoing cessation of **all** paramilitary activity.

CONCLUSION

9. The objective of this process is a comprehensive settlement which will lead to a better, more stable, future for all in Northern Ireland. That is certainly the British Government's aim. It is essential that we see the full exertion of their influence by parties in any way associated with paramilitary groups to urge them to renounce their activities. There is a great challenge ahead of us and the opportunity to influence for good the future of Northern Ireland. Paramilitarism can have no place in that future.

The Governments have already shown that where the integrity of this process is challenged by paramilitary activity, they will act decisively. Progress towards eliminating all such activity must be at the centre of all our efforts.