

Northern Ireland Women's Coalition

Statement on the Mitchell Review Process

Embargo 12.30 pm

16 November 99

The Women's Coalition continues to support the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, in all its aspects, as it was written and voted on in 1998. It is important therefore, that no renegotiation of the terms of the Agreement has taken place.

We concur with General de Chastelain's sense of urgency in furthering the implementation process at this time. We concur with Senator's Mitchell's assessment that he is increasingly confident of the parties' ability to implement the Agreement in full at this time, in a process which is agreed between us, and in a process that preserves the integrity of the Agreement. It will be important that this process has the active support of all the pro-Agreement parties, who represent the vast majority of the people.

We recognise the sharply divided nature of our society. We understand the range of fears as well as the reach of hope that underscores this process. We respect the attempts of all the pro-Agreement parties to address those fears and hopes, and urge them to demonstrate courage in taking these next steps.

We view conflict transformation as a process. An intrinsic aspect of that process is building of trust. We pay tribute to Senator Mitchell, whom, with seemingly infinite reserves of patience and willingness to listen, and to hear, enabled parties to lay the foundations for trust building over the course of the Review. It is now important that those at grassroots and constituency level have an opportunity to trust, share and understand the experiences of their political leaders.

It is also important that benchmarks of progress are achieved: small incremental steps, reciprocated at every opportunity: zipping and sealing the

Agreement. The de Chastelain report outlines a process by which movement on the essential area of decommissioning can be achieved. We look forward to the Senator's final report on the Review that we anticipate will outline a complementary process by which movement on the essential area of governance for Northern Ireland can be achieved.

People are ready and waiting for this. They are keen to hold their own government to account. Every day we hear from people concerning the health service, education, transport issues, the environment, the forthcoming round of European Structural Funds. They want to get on with it. They want us to get on with it.

We believe that ultimately the will of the people will be vindicated. They have placed their trust in us as political leaders to implement their will. We will do so: the people expect and deserve no less.