

**STATEMENT BY SENATOR GEORGE J. MITCHELL
18 NOVEMBER, 1999**

FINAL REPORT

I indicated in my last statement, on 15 November, that I expected to be in a position to issue a concluding report on the Review soon after the publication of the assessment of the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning (IICD), and of the parties' positions on the issues which we have been considering together in the Review.

Those steps have now been taken. Together they represent a set of extremely positive developments. I welcome the statements from the parties, which should further build mutual confidence in each other's commitment to the full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement and to the three principles as agreed on 25 June, namely:

- an inclusive Executive exercising devolved powers;
- decommissioning of all paramilitary arms by May 2000;

- decommissioning to be carried out in a manner determined by the IICD.

I also welcome the IICD assessment of how it can best achieve its mandate under the Agreement. I share its conclusion that

decommissioning is by definition a voluntary act and cannot be imposed. To bring decommissioning about, the Commission will need the co-operation and support of the political parties, using all the influence they have, together with the wholehearted commitment of paramilitary organisations.

While decommissioning is an essential element of the Agreement, the context in which it can be achieved is the overall implementation of that Agreement. All participants have a collective responsibility in this regard.

In response to the IICD assessment, the parties have made clear that the IICD is the agreed mechanism for achieving decommissioning, under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement.

In the light of these and of other encouraging developments, including the proposed appointment of authorised representatives of paramilitary organisations to the IICD, I believe that a basis now exists for devolution to occur, for the institutions to be established, and for decommissioning to take place as soon as possible. Devolution should take effect, then the Executive should meet, and then the paramilitary groups should appoint their authorised representatives, all on the same day, in that order. I hereby recommend to the Governments and the parties that they make the necessary arrangements to proceed, and call on them to do so without delay.

That completes the review, and with it my role in this process. I conclude with some personal comments.

Not long ago, the Ulster Unionists and Sinn Féin did not speak directly. In the early weeks of the review, their exchanges were harsh and filled with recrimination. But gradually, as one of them put it, "trust crept in." It may not be trust yet, but it's an important start, and the discussions did become serious and meaningful. For that credit goes to the leaders, David Trimble and Sir Reg Empey; and Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness. They, and the other leaders of their parties, set aside their hostility for the good of their society.

The Social Democratic and Labour Party led by John Hume and Seamus Mallon, provided crucial insight and involvement. It will play an important role in the Executive.

The leaders of the other pro-Agreement parties were strongly supportive: Sean Neeson and Seamus Close of Alliance, David Ervine and Billy Hutchinson of the Progressive Unionist Party, Monica McWilliams and Jane Morrice of the Northern Ireland Womens' Coalition, and Gary McMichael and David Adams of the Ulster Democratic Party; and all of their colleagues.

They and their parties were essential to the Good Friday Agreement. They are indispensable to its full implementation. It cannot and will not be done without them.

The Prime Ministers of the United Kingdom and Ireland, Tony Blair and Bertie Ahern, and President Clinton, played important roles in this effort, as did Mo Mowlam, David Andrews, and Liz O'Donnell. The new Secretary of State, Peter Mandelson, is a strong and effective leader who, in a short time, has had an enormous positive impact.

I also would like to recognize two superb officials, Bill Jeffrey for the British, and Dermot Gallagher for the Irish. With their colleagues, they provided me with invaluable assistance, for which they have my gratitude.

As a result of all of these efforts, neither side will get all it wanted and both will endure severe political pain. But there is no other way forward. Prolonging the stalemate will leave this society uncertain and vulnerable. If this process succeeds, the real winners will be the people, who want their

political leaders to work out their differences through democratic dialogue.

I have been involved in this effort for nearly five years. I cannot say that I've enjoyed every minute of it. But while on occasion it has been difficult, it also has been one of the most meaningful times of my life. I am totally committed to the cause of peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland.

And I can say that the longer I've been here the more I have come to admire and like and believe in the people. They're energetic and productive, warm and generous. I have been treated here as though I were at home. In a sense I am at home, because my emotions and a part of my heart will be here forever, even though I will not always be physically present.

My thanks to you ladies and gentlemen of the press for your courtesy, to the Prime Minister and Taoiseach for inviting me to take part in this process, to the party leaders with whom I have spent these past few months and who I respect for their

courage, and, finally, to the people for their warmth and hospitality.

I hope to return often, in other capacities. My fervent prayer is that it will be to a society in which hope and opportunity are alive and where a durable peace, tolerance and mutual respect are not distant dreams, but rather are the reality of daily life for all of the people.