

I N C O N F I D E N C E

RECORD OF A BILATERAL BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT TEAM AND THE
ALLIANCE PARTY AT PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS ON 9 MAY 1991

Government Team

Secretary of State
Minister of State
PUS
Mr Fell
Mr Pilling
Mr Thomas
Mr McNeill

Alliance Party

Mr Alderdice
Mr Close
Mr Neeson
Mrs Bell
Mr Dickson
Mr Jones
Mr McBride
Mr Morrow

Talks Secretariat

Mr D J R Hill
Mr Rodell

Also present

Mr Pawson

1. The Government Team outlined what had happened in the course of the day:

- They had met the SDLP in the morning to discuss the proposition which they had circulated to all the parties at 9.30 am (a copy of which is attached at Annex A). They had explained that the Unionists had already submitted a written response but that they wished to verify their understanding of it before discussing it with the SDLP. The SDLP had indicated that for their own part they were willing to accept the Government Team's proposition subject to certain amendments in the language.
- They had then met the joint Unionist delegation and had explained to them the SDLP's position. The Unionists had raised the question of chairmanship and had said that they had assumed that the Secretary of State would chair all the meetings; the Government Team had made it clear that this would not necessarily be the case. The Unionists had also asked about the involvement of the political parties in strand three. The Government Team had accepted that the modalities for feeding into strand three the views of

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other participants in the talks was an important question but had explained that it was not a matter on which the Government Team could give a definite view without speaking to the Irish Government.

- They had then met the SDLP again in the afternoon who confirmed that they were still opposed to the idea of meeting in Europe on grounds of public expenditure, practicality and security. The Government Team had raised the question of venues in Northern Ireland and the SDLP had said that their preference was for Armagh, that they would consider any proposal but that they were not attracted to the idea of Stormont. As to the question of chairmanship, the SDLP had said that they had not considered this an issue and so had not given it any thought, off the tops of their heads they thought that the nature of the agenda suggested that joint chairmanship would be appropriate.

- Finally, the Government Team had seen the joint Unionist delegation to warn them that the situation was nearing an impasse; to tell them that they would be speaking to the Irish Government about the questions of venue and chairmanship; and to ask them to reflect on their position over the weekend. On Monday morning the Government Team would attempt to establish if the situation had changed in any way; if it had not, then they would put forward their own proposition. If all the parties assented the talks would proceed, if any of them dissented the talks would be brought to as tidy a conclusion as possible.

2. The Alliance Party thanked the Government Team for this resume of their discussions and gave a brief account of their own meeting with the Unionist delegations. The Alliance Party had explained to the Unionists that as a matter of principle they did not believe that any issue about timing or venue should stand in the way of the talks. The Unionists for their part had asked the Alliance Party to convey to the Government

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Team their concern that if a compromise could not be found the talks would break down. The Government Team inquired as to whether the Alliance delegation had probed the Unionists on their objections to meeting in Northern Ireland; the Alliance Party said that the Unionists' main concern appeared to be that this would mean making a concession to the SDLP. For their own part they could see nothing objectionable in the Government Team's proposals.

3. The Alliance Party undertook to reflect on the situation over the weekend and to bring any new thoughts they might have to the meeting on Monday morning.

4. The meeting concluded at 4.35 pm.

TALKS SECRETARIAT