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POLITICAL TALKS: COMMON THEMES

(1 May 1992)

Introduction

1. This paper seeks to identify the common themes which emerged from the previous talks.

Constitutional Status and Guarantee

2. It is accepted by all the talks participants that Northern Ireland is de facto a part of the United Kingdom; that there should be no change in that position without the consent of a majority of the people who live here; and that at present a majority of the people who live here do not wish for any change. More discussion may be needed on the way in which the 'constitutional guarantee' is worded.

Nature of the Northern Ireland Community

3. There are [at least] two distinct communal identities in Northern Ireland, both of which need to be given full recognition by the other so that they can be appropriately accommodated in the political system, taking account of the wider framework of relationships within these islands.

Local Institutions

4. There is a need for greater direct local political involvement in the business of governing Northern Ireland. This is a large and complex subject which will need to be addressed on several levels and in considerable detail, including in respect of both legislative and executive responsibilities.

5. Simple unfettered majority rule would not be a sufficient basis for any new local institutions. Any new local political institutions should be workable and likely to prove stable and durable; they should command widespread support and provide an appropriate and fair role for representatives of both sides of the community.

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Wider Relationships

6. Northern Ireland's relationships with the EC, with the rest of the United Kingdom and with the rest of the island of Ireland, have an important bearing on Northern Ireland and its people. Real progress will only be possible through finding ways of giving adequate expression to the totality of the three main relationships mentioned in the statement of 26 March 1991.

7. For so long as Northern Ireland remains a part of the UK, the relationship between Northern Ireland and the UK Government and Parliament will continue to be of central importance. The relationship between the UK Government and Parliament and any new institutions will need to be carefully delineated to ensure that the proper interests of the UK Government, in relation, for example, to financial matters, and its obligations under various international instruments are taken fully into account.

8. Ideally, there should be good and harmonious relations within the island of Ireland and practical co-operation between the respective authorities should be developed in their mutual interest. The extent to which new relationships (the parameters of which will be discussed in Strand 2) might help to resolve political tensions and difficulties within the Northern Ireland community needs further consideration.

Constitutional Politics/Defeating Terrorism

9. All the participants in the Talks are united in their opposition to terrorism and in their determination to resolve problems through constitutional means.

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10. Law and order could more effectively be maintained in Northern Ireland if there were a greater basic political consensus leading to wider public support for, and confidence in, the security forces.

11. [There is general agreement on the desirability of] [or: It would be desirable to secure] local political input into security policy.

Individual Rights

12. The establishment of machinery to deal with and correct grievances and to entrench individual and community rights, including the possibility of a Bill of Rights, requires further detailed consideration.

Endorsement

13. Any political accommodation affecting Northern Ireland should be subject to endorsement by the people of Northern Ireland.

14. The SDLP have expressed a firm belief in the requirement for a broader endorsement of any political accommodation affecting Northern Ireland. The Unionist parties recognise the strength of this view but have some concerns on the matter. They have, however, undertaken to consider and draft further proposals in an attempt to establish other ways in which it might be possible to address this issue.

Commitment

15. All involved acknowledge the need for realism, commitment, hard work and compromise if suitable institutions, within a wider framework of stable relationships, are to be established.

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