

The Alliance Party of Northern Ireland

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“ P R E S S R E L E A S E ”

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Alliance Party releases submission to International Body on Decommissioning

The Alliance Party, following its two hour meeting with Senator George Mitchell and his team on Saturday, has published its written submission on the decommissioning of weapons. Alliance Leader, Dr John Alderdice, has stressed that although some of the Body's work on this issue may need to be confidential, it is important that the twin-track process is as transparent as possible.

Dr Alderdice said:

“It is vital that everybody in Northern Ireland can feel part of this process and that what the political parties say on behalf of the people is open to public scrutiny. It is in this spirit that we have published our submission.

“Having been in talks with Sinn Fein, the PUP and UDP for some time, the Alliance Party clearly has not set preconditions on talking to any of the other parties in this process, but we do recognise the genuine concerns of many people in Northern Ireland, and indeed in the Republic of Ireland, in relation to the decommissioning issue. The continued existence of illegal weapons undermines the peace process by perpetuating communal fears of a return to violence. It was interesting to hear Vice President De Klerk say, on his recent trip to Dublin, that the weapons issue had not been handled well in the South African peace process and had subsequently caused serious loss of life. We should learn from this experience.

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"Our submission to Senator Mitchell's Commission, has tried to deal with the realities of the present situation and recognises that decommissioning's central importance is about the building of trust, which will facilitate political progress. The ultimate objective must be the removal of illegal weapons and the standing down of those organisations which have held and used them. While we recognise that this is unlikely to happen in a complete or comprehensive way in advance of an overall political agreement we have set out in our submission our views on the principles and methods of decommissioning.

"While the process of decommissioning is ongoing, the political track must continue. The frequency of our bilateral talks has increased considerably in recent days but it is clear that all-party talks could still be a long way off. This is one of the main reasons why we have suggested that the next step on the political track is an election to all-party talks in the form of a time-limited Convention. This view of progress on the political track is also something that we put to the Commission on Saturday."

Notes

The main points of the Alliance submission are:

1. De-commissioning is crucial for trust in the process, and for the building of a stable and peaceful society.
2. Described a menu of action involving verifiable inventorization, followed by inspection by field officers, and subsequent physical de-commissioning.
3. Link with the political track involves a choice of two possibilities -
 - de-commissioning proceeds to physical operation and then all-party talks are possibleOR
 - progress on menu of action, and election to all-party talks body, with de-commissioning following along with the talks process.