

**SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC AND LABOUR PARTY**

**POLITICAL STRUCTURES**

**IN**

**NORTHERN IRELAND**

**FORUM FOR PEACE AND RECONCILIATION**

**DUBLIN CASTLE**

**16 JUNE, 1995**

1. The SDLP view the creation of structures within Northern Ireland as an attempt to address only one aspect of the totality of relationships that underly the conflict in Ireland. In meeting this challenge, it is axiomatic that there can be no internal solution to the Northern Ireland problem.
2. Therefore in considering structures within Northern Ireland, it must be clearly stated that any structures to be established are for the primary purpose of addressing the relationship between the nationalist and unionist political traditions and communities.
3. It is not simply a matter of what kind of political structures there might be established within Northern Ireland, but rather what those proposed structures can achieve politically in addressing, healing and advancing that important relationship between Unionist and Nationalist, Catholic and Protestant, within Northern Ireland.
4. The dominant requirement is the establishment of democratic structures that will naturally generate the allegiance and support of a broad consensus across both political traditions. The core issue, is one of allegiance and identity. This core issue must be tackled with determination, skill and imagination. We need to avoid the mistakes of majoritarianism in decision making and build structures with which people from both communities can wholeheartedly identify. In short any future structures should bridge communal differences and remove sectarian conflict.
5. The central principle of the SDLP with regard to any political structures for Northern Ireland has been that of Partnership between the two major traditions. This has been a guiding principle of the SDLP since the Party's foundation.
6. One of our main tasks at present is to affirm the key principles of future structures, building upon the principles as set out in the Joint Declaration and the Framework Document.
7. The SDLP's position is based on the following principles which we regard as fundamental.

#### THE PRINCIPLES:

1. New political structures should be such as to enable both political traditions to identify with them.

2. The structures respect the diversity of political identity and ensure parity of esteem for both political traditions.
  3. The structures are stable and enduring.
  4. The structures are workable and practical and capable of servicing the whole community.
  5. The structures are self sustaining and enriching.
  6. The structures are innovative and dynamic and capable of development.
  7. The structures are democratic and representative.
  8. The structures are reconciliatory and effective in breaking down barriers between the two political traditions and the creation of a new political consensus.
  9. The structures are set in a political context that transcends the confines of Northern Ireland itself.
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8. In the search for an outline political model for structures within Northern Ireland, the SDLP sees the structures of the European Union as appropriate models for the contemporary needs of the political situation in Northern Ireland. These structures should reflect and respect the diversity of the population, and create the circumstances in which all can work together in our common social and economic interests.
  9. In addition, as both parts of Ireland are part of the European Union, the linkage established between both by that common membership, has a significant part to play in the political and economic development of the whole island, particularly within the context of greater European unity and the process of European convergence. The need for an active European dimension is therefore appropriate and important.
  10. During the recent talks process we proposed an Executive Commission and an Assembly reflecting these principles. We remain committed to these proposals, but we have made clear we are willing to consider others.
  11. The SDLP has welcomed Part 1 of the "Frameworks for the Future", in that

it reflects the principles and proposals referred to above.

12. The SDLP welcomed the 'Possible Arrangements: Outline' as a basis upon which agreed political structures for Northern Ireland could be built through a process of dialogue, debate and negotiations.
13. SDLP does not view Part 1 of the "Frameworks for the Future" document or its proposals, as isolated, nor separate from Part II, 'A New Framework for Agreement'. Both parts of the "Frameworks for the Future" document have an organic unity and in our view are a serious and genuine attempt to address the complex and interdependent relations that exist on this island.
14. We therefore welcome the British Government's reiteration of the Joint Declaration at Part I, Annex A, Page 13, that it is "..... working with the Irish Government to achieve such an agreement, which will embrace the totality of relationships."

And that:

"Any political agreement must address all the relevant relationships, not only between the two main parts of the Community within Northern Ireland, including the relationships between any new political institutions there and the Westminster Parliament, but also those between Northern Ireland and the Republic and between the United Kingdom and Irish governments."