

19 March 1996,

Rt Hon Sir Patrick Mayhew MP QC,  
Secretary of State for NI,  
Stormont Castle,  
Stormont Estate,  
BELFAST BT4 3ST.

I received your most recent consultation paper through Sir John Kerr while I was still in Washington DC, and have discussed it with my colleagues, and with Michael Ancram on my return. I nevertheless felt it important to put these thoughts on paper, subsequent to the meeting with Michael today, since there seems to be a degree of confusion around.

In the main the Ground Rules described in the paper are lifted from our arrangements from 1991/2, and in so far as this is the case we have no difficulty. In a number of respects however there are *differences*, and it is with some of these differences that we have problems.

1. The Communiqué of 28 February, quoted in para 10, and following on from the Mitchell Report makes clear that not only a cease-fire, but also subscription to Six Principles of Democracy **and at the same stage** the issue of Decommissioning, must be addressed. You spoke in our last meeting of this being like 'registration' rather than a pre-condition. However it is described, the effect **must be** to achieve a real commitment from all parties on both of these issues, especially from the Loyalists and the Republicans. In the document it appears that only a cease-fire is really required. I am aware that the Irish Government is trying to fudge the issue, but this will not do. The whole process will either immediately collapse, or become impossibly bogged down, if we do not have clarity on these questions. We need a firm and formal subscription to the Six Principles, **and** an acceptance of the process of Decommissioning as per Mitchell (through an International Body). This cannot simply be hoped for in an opening presentation, where parties will be free to ramble all around, and give equivocal statements which they can subsequently recant or re-interpret. There is the further attendant question of who will decide on whether this matter has been satisfactorily addressed before we move off into the presentations and subsequent negotiations on the political structures in Strands 1, 2 & 3.

2. We are unhappy about the impression that the Agenda for the Negotiations should be re-opened as a matter for discussion. This issue was sorted out in 1991. Others who chose to join us late should not have the prerogative of unstitching agreements which the rest of us worked for four years to construct, and which have subsequently formed the basis for discussions and agreements for some five years. To allow the script to be rewritten at this point would not only create disastrous delays but would allow that anyone who decides opt out of democracy should not only be able to hold us back for years (as they already have), but also re-write the script to their agenda, on their return.
3. It is unclear quite now para 13 would be policed.
4. A new structure is proposed - the plenary of the negotiations. This introduces a whole new set of complications. Have these been thought through? Who will chair this plenary? Are the strands a form of 'sub-committee' to this body? The implications of this proposal are considerable.
5. The Co-ordination Committee is acceptable as described to us in the document **and** subsequently clarified in the meeting today with Michael, where he indicated that it was purely for liaison between strands, **not** competent to address 'within' strand issues, and not to deal with substance or content.
6. What constitutes 'sufficient consensus' is clearly a very important issue for all the participants. As indicated in the paper it must be resolved in advance of being required.

It will be clear from these comments that we believe the issues to which this paper refers will not easily be settled, and we look forward to further conversations with the Government on this. We have also asked the Irish Government for a meeting on the same subject.

Dr John Alderdice  
PARTY LEADER