

“ P R E S S R E L E A S E ”

12 January 1998

Alderdice: Heads of Agreement mean “all gain, no pain” for Alliance.

Reacting to the publication of the paper outlining heads of agreement between the two governments, Alliance Leader Lord Alderdice said:

“After a month when the whole focus has been on the extremes of violence and despair this initiative by the two Prime Ministers has focused attention on the opportunity which democratic politicians have to agree a balanced and workable political settlement.

“I have no doubt that this will be welcomed by the vast majority of people and when our deliberations are completed in May they will have the opportunity to express their support in a referendum.

“The Heads of Agreement document outlines the kind of fair settlement that Alliance has been promoting through thick and thin over the last thirty years.

“There have been grim times when these Alliance proposals were unfashionable but without fail when the governments, committed to democracy and the rule of law, gave due attention to the problem, they come back to Alliance proposals - the principle of consent, power-sharing devolution, practical North- South co-operation, closer relationships amongst all the people of these islands, binding protections for all minorities and indeed for every individual citizen, and fundamental to all, the primacy of the rule of law. These are the necessary ingredients for a settlement and for the first time in a long time Alliance is able to be optimistic that an outcome is becoming possible.

“For all the other Parties this package will have pain as well as comfort, but its closeness to Alliance’s own blueprint means that for Alliance this document is all gain, no pain.”

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(12 January 1998)

PROPOSITIONS ON HEADS OF AGREEMENT

Balanced constitutional change, based on commitment to the principle of consent in all its aspects by both British and Irish Governments, to include both changes to the Irish Constitution and to British constitutional legislation.

Democratically elected institutions in Northern Ireland, to include a Northern Ireland Assembly, elected by a system of proportional representation, exercising devolved executive and legislative responsibility over at least the responsibilities of the six Northern Ireland Departments, and with provisions to ensure that all sections of the community can participate and work together successfully in the operation of these institutions and that all sections of the community are protected.

A new British-Irish Agreement to replace the existing Anglo-Irish Agreement and help establish close co-operation and enhance relationships, embracing:

- An intergovernmental Council to deal with the totality of relationships, to include representatives of the British and Irish Governments, the Northern Ireland Administration and the devolved institutions in Scotland and Wales, with meetings twice a year at Summit level.
- A North/South Ministerial Council to bring together those with executive responsibilities in Northern Ireland and the Irish Government in particular areas. Each side will consult, co-operate and take decisions on matters of mutual interest within the mandate of, and accountable to, the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Oireachtas respectively. All decisions will be by agreement between the two sides, North and South.
- Suitable implementation bodies and mechanisms for policies agreed by the North/South Council in meaningful areas and at an all-island level.
- Standing intergovernmental machinery between the Irish and British Governments, covering issues of mutual interest, including non-devolved issues for Northern Ireland, when representatives of the Northern Ireland Administration would be involved.

Provision to safeguard the rights of both communities in Northern Ireland, through arrangements for the comprehensive protection of fundamental human, civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights, including a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland supplementing the provisions of the European Convention and to achieve full respect for the principles of equity of treatment and freedom from discrimination, and the cultural

identity and ethos of both communities. Appropriate steps to ensure an equivalent level of protection in the Republic.

Effective and practical measures to establish and consolidate an acceptable peaceful society, dealing with issues such as prisoners, security in all its aspects, policing and decommissioning of weapons.

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JOINT STATEMENT BY THE BRITISH AND IRISH GOVERNMENTS

1. The British and Irish Governments have been working intensively over the Christmas break on the paper presented today. The title of the paper - **Propositions on Heads of Agreement** - accurately conveys both our intentions and the scope of the paper. First of all, what we have set down are propositions for debate and discussion. Secondly, the various elements, taken together, offer only the outline of an acceptable agreement. As can quickly be seen, these are not detailed proposals. Even if consensus were to be reached that they constituted a satisfactory package, a great deal of work would still be necessary.

2. These propositions are a basis for discussion, which we hope could help the talks participants move towards agreement. They have been tabled on our behalf by the Chairman, Senator Mitchell. There will be an opportunity to discuss the propositions at a meeting of the talks participants tomorrow afternoon.

3. The point has already been made about the difficulty of finding a generally satisfactory way of tabling proposals. But those in Government have a duty - especially in current circumstances - to take whatever steps are necessary to promote substantive political progress.

4. A second, crucial, point is that these propositions, while in the name of the two Governments, derive in a very real sense from the views of all parties on the various issues which arise in the talks - expressed both in bilateral meetings and in the round table discussions which have taken place. The possible propositions we have tabled represent our best guess at what could be a generally acceptable outcome.

5. The two Governments do not have a problem

- in clarifying certain matters, for example
 - constitutional change will include changes to Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution and to Section 75 of the Government of Ireland Act 1920 and
 - the new British Irish Agreement will embrace both the intergovernmental Council and the North/South Ministerial Council, which will operate independently in their designated areas of responsibility
- and with acknowledging that matters not directly referred to in the paper will be dealt with where it makes sense, for example
 - issues where harmonising or cross-border action is appropriate will be dealt with on that basis.

The Governments wish to make clear that the position and sensitivities of the victims of violence are fully acknowledged and will continue to be taken into account where appropriate.

6. The propositions need to be elucidated in detailed discussion before parties can assess the overall impact of the proposals. We hope a discussion of the possible propositions will help participants collectively to generate a broad understanding of the key elements of a settlement and of the balances which need to be struck between those elements, and thus make it easier to engage in tough detailed negotiation on specific aspects of it. What we ask is that we now proceed to the detail and all parties make their judgement then.