

British 9-paragraph note, sent on 19 March 1993

1. The importance of what has been said, the wish to take it seriously, and the influence of events on the ground, have been acknowledged. All of those involved share a responsibility to work to end the conflict. No one has a monopoly of suffering. There is a need for a healing process.

2. It is essential that there should be no deception on either side, and also that no deception should, through any misunderstanding, be seen where it is not intended. It is also essential that both sides have a clear and realistic understanding of what it is possible to achieve, so that neither side can in the future claim that it has been tricked.

3. The position of the British Government on dealing with those who espouse violence is clearly understood. This is why the envisaged sequence of events is important. What is being sought at this stage is advice. The position of the British Government is that any dialogue could only follow a halt to violent activity. It is understood that in the first instance this would have to be unannounced. If violence had genuinely been brought to an end, whether or not that fact had been announced, then progressive entry into dialogue could take place.

4. It must be understood, though, that once a halt to activity became public, the British Government would have to acknowledge and defend its entry into dialogue. It would do so by pointing out that its agreement to exploratory dialogue about the possibility of an inclusive process had been given because - and only because - it had received a private assurance that organised violence had been brought to an end.

5. The British Government has made clear that:

- no political objective which is advocated by constitutional means alone could properly be excluded from discussion in the talks process;
- the commitment to return as much responsibility as possible to local politicians should be seen within a wider framework of stable relationships to be worked out with all concerned;
- new political arrangements would be designed to ensure that no legitimate group was excluded from eligibility to share in the exercise of this responsibility;
- in the event of a genuine and established ending of violence, the whole range of responses to it would inevitably be looked at afresh.

6. The British Government has no desire to inhibit or impede legitimate constitutional expression of any political opinion, or any such input to the political process, and wants to see included in this process all main parties which have sufficiently shown they genuinely do not espouse violence. It has no blueprint. It wants an agreed accommodation, not an imposed settlement, arrived at through an inclusive process in which the parties are free agents.

7. The British Government does not have, and will not adopt, any prior objective of "ending of partition". The British Government cannot enter a talks process, or expect others to do so, with the purpose of achieving a predetermined outcome, whether the "ending of partition" or anything else. It has accepted that the eventual outcome of such a process could be a united Ireland, but this can only be on the basis of the consent of the people of Northern Ireland. Should this be the eventual outcome of a peaceful democratic process, the British Government would bring forward legislation to implement the will of the people here. But unless

the people of Northern Ireland come to express such a view, the British Government will continue to uphold the union, seeking to ensure the good governance of Northern Ireland, in the interests of all its people, within the totality of relationships in these islands.

8. Evidence on the ground that any group had ceased violent activity would induce resulting reduction of security force activity. Were violence to end, the British Government's overall response in terms of security force activity on the ground would still have to take account of the overall threat. The threat posed by Republican and Loyalist groups which remained active would have to continue to be countered.

9. It is important to establish whether this provides a basis for a way forward. The British Government would answer specific questions or give further explanation.