

DRAFT SUMMARY RECORD OF OPENING PLENARY SESSION -
MONDAY 21 OCTOBER 1996 (16.30)

Those present:

Independent Chairmen	Government Teams	Parties
Mr Holkeri	British Government	Alliance Party
General de Chastelain	Irish Government	Labour
		Northern Ireland Women's Coalition
		Progressive Unionist Party
		Social Democratic and Labour Party
		Ulster Democratic Party
		Ulster Democratic Unionist Party
		United Kingdom Unionist Party
		Ulster Unionist Party

1. The Chairman reconvened the session at 16.30 and asked the DUP to continue with its address on item two of the agenda. The PUP intervened saying that it understood that the DUP address might not take much longer and in these circumstances it asked whether it was possible to adjourn the session earlier than the intended time of 18.00. The PUP suggested that the plenary be reconvened at 12 noon the following day.
2. The DUP raised no objection to this but believed it better to start at 10.00am on the next day. The Chairman then proposed that the plenary on Tuesday 22 October should start at 10.00am. He then proposed a finishing time of 17.00 which all participants agreed with.
3. The DUP then continued its address on item two. It said that when the adjournment had been called it had begun to talk about the Report of the International Body and had referred to statement

made by the British Government that the International Arms Body might find some other means of building confidence, other than by decommissioning. The DUP said that when it made its previous comments it was referring to these other reasons in the report. It had also pointed out that the report's principles were very strong and that no democrat could have any problem with them. But the problem was that the report was not as strong as the principles contained within it. The report in the DUP's view therefore, represented a fudge on the main issues because it did not articulate a direct and specific application of the principles.

4. The DUP said that a fudge was what had been happening throughout the political process this far. The DUP then quoted paragraph 33 of the International Body's Report. In doing so the party said that it didn't think there was any half-way house between the two positions so described. One either had to take one position or the other; there was however no alternative means of building confidence other than to have decommissioning dealt with before negotiations commenced. The DUP said one had to think about the victims of the terrorists and the whole sections of cemeteries filled with the victims of a religious cleanser who had murdered a whole generation of Protestants in one particular area. The party restated its view that there was no half-way house possible because such compromise didn't lead to decommissioning. The DUP said that, with all due respect to the International Body, it had failed to understand the methods and beliefs of Irish Republicanism if it thought it could find a way between both positions. The party recalled comments made by a former Northern Ireland Secretary of State, Jim Prior, who at his first meeting with the DUP had commented about his success in solving many trade union disputes, Mr Prior had said that Northern Ireland was just

another trade union dispute and he would have it solved soon. The DUP stated that everyone knew what happened in Northern Ireland during Mr Prior's reign.

5. The party said this was why it was so important for people to grasp the nettle of decommissioning. It was a vital issue and everyone needed to face up to a law and order situation. In moving to paragraph 34 of the Report of the International Body, the DUP said that this was simply an attempt to try and reach some mutual understanding between the two positions. But how could you come to any mutual understanding with Sinn Fein? Who were Sinn Fein? Firstly Gerry Adams was President of Sinn Fein. He had been elected to the Forum in Dublin and had had a checkered political history and involvement with the IRA. Secondly there was Martin McGuinness, Vice President of Sinn Fein, elected to the Forum, who at one point had claimed to be proud to be the IRA commander in Londonderry, although he later denied he had said this. Then there was Gerard Kelly, a Sinn Fein representative during talks with Government officials, elected to the Forum and convicted of being involved in the Old Bailey bombing in the seventies, which killed one individual and injured several dozen others. The DUP asked whether the International Body really knew these men, even though it had met Gerry Adams. Then there was Breda O'Hare, the Sinn Fein Press Officer, who had been tried for the shooting of an army warrant officer and who had subsequently escaped bail.

6. These were the sort of people from whom the International Body was trying to seek some form of compromise in paragraph 34. The DUP said it recalled the SDLP leader's past comments about the party being concerned with a United Ireland or nothing. The DUP said this was the true face of Irish Republicanism and this was

what Sinn Fein/IRA wanted above all else. The DUP said that surely the people of Northern Ireland would not be made to suffer another cycle of violence with more death, destruction and mayhem heaped on them as a result of no decommissioning taking place and Sinn Fein being allowed to hold on to its weapons. If this new cycle of violence was to be avoided, then all illegal weapons must be handed over to the Governments in both jurisdictions. The DUP said that if one Government wanted to hand over authority on this issue, that was up to them, but the DUP didn't support this line.

7. The DUP again emphasised that there could be no compromise on the basis of paragraph 34 of the International Body Report unless decommissioning was voluntary. If there was no agreement to voluntary decommissioning, then the weapons would have to be taken by force. The party continued highlighting what the British Government had recently outlined in terms of removing all handguns after publication of the Cullen Report, which followed the massacre at Dunblane. The DUP stated that the families of Dunblane had suffered terribly, but as a result of the tragedy, the British Government was going to take away every legally-held weapon in the appropriate categories. Yet public comment seemed to be suggesting that this action wasn't enough. However when parties like the DUP said that illegal weapons in Northern Ireland should be handed in, then hours were spent debating the whole issue and making a case which had been previously supported by the two Governments.

8. The DUP said that the British Government favoured the Cullen Report's conclusions in Northern Ireland because it raised the issue of legally-held weapons and there were those on the Sinn Fein/IRA side who viewed the removal of these as a political issue. The DUP, however, wanted the British Government to take

the illegally-held guns away in Northern Ireland. As for the Irish Government, it had to decide itself how to handle this issue but one had only to look at the recent killing of the Garda in Adare to remember that it also had problems with illegally-held weapons. The DUP said the Irish Government needed to realise how unionists in Northern Ireland felt about this issue, given 27 years of murder, violence and shootings, yet all unionists saw was the Irish Government in cahoots with the IRA in attempts to get Sinn Fein into the talks process. That was why, in its view, the agenda recently agreed to was no more than a plan for surrender. It was impossible to build confidence with Sinn Fein. It's word could not be trusted. The British Prime Minister had at one stage said that if Sinn Fein/IRA broke the cease-fire they would go to Coventry because they would be regarded as political outcasts. But what happened after the cease-fire? Neither the British nor Irish Governments met Sinn Fein, but their officials did, and they were continuing to do so even as the Lisburn bomb exploded a few weeks back.

9. The DUP again emphasised its view that the agenda provided the road towards capitulation, not decommissioning. In relation to paragraph 35 of the International Body's Report and the reference to "progress is made on political issues", the DUP said that the only political issue which Sinn Fein/IRA was interested in was that of a united Ireland. It didn't appear to be interested in anything else and it certainly wasn't interested in jobs in Northern Ireland. This had been illustrated in Londonderry when the IRA blew up the local jobmarket only to use the vacant site to plaster posters with the message "vote for the IRA, vote for jobs". Yet these were the sort of people who were going to be involved in a "progressive pattern of mounting trust and confidence". The DUP said these were the people who were

prepared to undertake dastardly deeds and the RUC Chief Constable was now saying that the Province was in for twelve months of this. The message from the DUP was crystal clear. There was no way to guarantee confidence other than to remove the power to wage war. However one of the great tragedies of recent times was that there was always someone prepared to throw Sinn Fein a lifeline when it appeared that it was almost down and out.

10. The DUP said that this whole exercise was exactly that lifeline. There were those who were saying that Sinn Fein/IRA had to be helped. The only way to help it was to take the guns from it. People had to be prepared to give nothing to them; no guns or no army should be made available to assist the terrorists. All participants had to follow this course of action because no electoral representative had the right to put other people at risk just because it was politically expedient for them to do so. The DUP said, in its view, paragraphs 34 and 35 did not provide a guarantee of building confidence. If the IRA had continued with a cease-fire, it would have been brought into the talks process quickly. Statements would have been made about peace, stability and the benefits of a cease-fire, but the people on the ground didn't see many advantages of this position during the aborted cease-fire. The DUP said that the International Body's Report did not provide a solution and the compromise it offered was a dangerous one. The British Government had at first banned this language. What a pity it took it back out again and dressed it up as something which was on the table today.

11. The Chairman, seeing that the time had almost reached 17.00, proposed that the plenary reconvene at 10.00am the following day. The Chairman then added that the session would not go beyond 17.00 on the following day. Following an exchange between the DUP and

SDLP, the Chairman said it was entirely up to the participants as to the eventual decisions on timing. He then adjourned the session at 17.02 indicating a starting time of 10.00am for the following day. A lunch-break would then be taken around 12 noon with the session reconvening at 14.00. It would then be decided what the finishing time should be.

12. The DUP raised the issue of flight arrangements and proposed stopping the plenary session at 16.00 the next day. This was agreed by all participants.

Independent Chairmen Notetakers
25 October 1996

OIC/PS29