DRAFT SUMMARY RECORD OF OPENING PLENARY SESSION - MONDAY 18 NOVEMBER 1996 (12.10)

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 (Mr Holkeri) convened the meeting at 12.10 and asked that before the business proceed to discuss item 2 on the agenda, approval should be sought on the draft records from week commencing 4 November. There were nine draft records in all, with six circulated the previous Friday and three circulated on 8 November. The Chairman asked whether participants had now had sufficient time to review these.

2. The DUP said that it had not. The Chairman indicated that the draft records would then be approved at a later plenary meeting. This was agreed by all. The Chairman added that since the last plenary meeting, during which it had been agreed that participants could produce further proposals by 10.00am on 13 November, four parties had responded to this and the papers had been circulated by his office. The four participants who had submitted additional proposals were NIWC, DUP, UKUP and UUP. The Chairman then asked the meeting to continue with a discussion of item 2 of the agenda.

3. The SDLP reported that it had been engaged in a number of bilaterals since the last plenary session. The party noted the Chairman's remarks that four documents had been produced and circulated, yet it had so far only received two and hadn't had time to consider these in depth. The SDLP stated that it didn't believe the bilateral process had been fully exhausted thus far and in terms of moving forward on the issue under discussion, it proposed an adjournment to enable further bilaterals to take place. The SDLP said that the bilateral process during the last number of days had produced good and frank exchanges of views, but more time was needed to try to reach some common understandings.

4. The DUP said it was happy to support the SDLP's motion of an adjournment. The party asked about the overall timetable for the week, particularly in view of the absence of several individuals on business elsewhere and whether this situation permitted sufficient numbers of delegates to be available should a further plenary be called. The DUP also asked about the timing of the four sets of proposals submitted and whether other participants, such as the two governments, were going to submit their views at some point soon.

5. The Chairman asked General de Chastelain to comment at this point since the latter had been present the previous week. General de Chastelain stated that those parties (NIWC, DUP and UKUP) had submitted their proposals on time on 13 November. The UUP had submitted their proposals a little later that same day. There were no indications from other participants at that time that they would provide additional submissions.

6. The UUP said it generally supported the thrust of previous comments regarding an adjournment. The party, however, felt it was disappointing that only a narrow range of documents had appeared following the Chairman's proposal. The UUP asked whether others intended to prepare further proposals as it was unsure as to the benefits of having only four in circulation. The party said if it was the case that only four were going to be available for the foreseeable future, then it was better to proceed in bilateral format as there simply were not enough proposals in circulation to warrant a general discussion. Alliance stated that its original paper on decommissioning was very detailed. It did, however, believe that it was better to engage in more bilaterals at this point and the party would willingly explain its proposals further during these exchanges if this was required. Alliance added that the SDLP proposal to adjourn was therefore a worthwhile one.

7. The SDLP stated that it was not being shy in terms of not providing further proposals at this point. The party believed that further examination of current documents alongside other participants was likely to be more helpful now and this was the reason for proposing the bilateral approach. The Irish Government said that its position was probably similar to that of the British Government on this. It had put forward a joint proposal some weeks back prior to dialogue between the parties taking place. The bilateral process was, in its view, worth continuing as there remained a need to gain a better feel for what dialogue was likely to produce.

8. The UKUP said it broadly agreed with the SDLP proposal. The party added, however, that it believed it would be helpful, from a procedural viewpoint, to know whether the governments and Alliance

were going to come in and offer their views at this stage. The UKUP said that on reading the four sets of documents thus far, there appeared to be some interesting and common proposals coming from the pro-union parties. All three parties had made it clear that there must be a declaration of a cease-fire which was both complete and permanent. Secondly such a declaration needed to be accompanied by the handing over of a credible amount of arms.

9. Following a point of order from the SDLP, the UKUP continued to list the proposals common to the pro-union parties. Thirdly, it said, the declaration had to make it clear that the six Mitchell Principles must be subscribed-to and finally there had to be acceptance that political progress could not be linked in any way to progress on decommissioning. The UKUP said these proposals had now been clearly identified. Procedurally it would therefore be helpful to have a response or counter proposal made to these points. The UKUP said that perhaps Alliance and the two governments didn't wish to do this, given that these points emanated from the pro-union position, but the party was suggesting that now was the time to make a response to these proposals.

10. The British Government stated that it believed a consensus had been formed for continued bilaterals. This, it believed, was the right approach and it endorsed the earlier comments made by the Irish Government. The British Government said that it had listened to the UKUP's comments and it would consider whether to put in a further paper in due course.

11. The Chairman asked that if the current session was adjourned, what was the view of participants as to when it should meet again?

The Chairman said he recognised the difficulties of attendance this week and said, if he had understood the comments correctly, that there was no desire for a plenary on Tuesday 19 November. This was confirmed by the participants. The Chairman then asked about Wednesday 20 November. The UKUP said that it had a difficulty before noon on Wednesday. The DUP said it also had problems with Wednesday morning. The UUP suggested that the next meeting be left at the call of the chair so that one could see how people were placed later in the week.

12. Both the PUP and UDP said that they had problems throughout Wednesday but were not suggesting that there should not be a plenary meeting as a result of their position. The Chairman then stated that the next plenary would resume subject to the call of the chair, but not before Wednesday 20 November at noon. The DUP stated that its office staff would be present should arrangements need to be made with it for further bilaterals. With this the Chairman adjourned the meeting at 12.26.

Independent Chairmen Notetakers
21 November 1996

OIC/PS49