

Office of the Independent Chairmen

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SUMMARY RECORD OF PLENARY SESSION - MONDAY 12 JANUARY 1998 (1625)

Those present:

INDEPENDENT CHAIRMEN	GOVERNMENT TEAMS	PARTIES
Senator Mitchell	British Government	Alliance
Mr Holkeri	Irish Government	Labour
General de Chastelain		Northern Ireland Women's Coalition
		Progressive Unionist Party
		Sinn Féin
		Social Democratic & Labour Party
		Ulster Democratic Party
		Ulster Unionist Party

1. The Chairman convened the meeting at 1625 and stated that the sole purpose of the session, which had been established by the Business Committee earlier that day, was to table the document prepared by the two Governments entitled "Propositions on the Heads of Agreement".

2. Before moving to this business, the Chairman, speaking on behalf of his co-chairmen, said all were pleased to be back with the process and grateful that all participants had also returned despite the difficult interim period for everyone concerned. With this in mind the Chairman offered, on behalf of everyone involved in the process, sincere condolences to all the victims and their relatives who had suffered during the Christmas and New Year period. The Chairman said he hoped everyone's presence signalled a resolve to deal with the important issues which were the subject matter of the talks.

3. The Chairman said he understood that the Business Committee had recommended that a discussion on the Governments' "Propositions on Heads of Agreement" paper be scheduled for 1400 on Tuesday 13 January. Furthermore since this arrangement now displaced a previously arranged meeting of the Liaison Sub-committee on Confidence Building Measures, the latter would now take place at 1100 on 13 January. The Chairman asked whether there was any disagreement with this revised schedule. Hearing none, he moved on.

4. The Chairman said that with respect to the paper presented by both Governments, which was now formally tabled, he wished to put forward the view that everyone should exercise caution and judgement in making any public comments on the document. Undoubtedly participants would be questioned by the media but it had to be remembered that the talks process was at an important stage and he hoped such comments would not preclude serious discussions the following day. The Chairman said that since the meeting was called to table the Government's paper and this had been done, he asked whether there were any comments from the participants.

5. Sinn Féin said it hadn't, as yet, had an opportunity to study the Governments' paper since it had only just received its copy. It was, however, the party's view that the two Governments had to take a lead with the negotiations. Sinn Féin said it would be participating fully and bringing its own analysis to the discussion tomorrow and would be seeking further clarification from the Governments in areas where it felt this was required. The Chairman noted Sinn Féin's comments and asked whether there were any other comments from participants.

6. Alliance asked the Governments about their intention with respect to public handling of the document, recognising that the rules permitted participants who produced papers to decide themselves about releasing the contents to the media. The British Government said the intention was to make public the proposal shortly without any detailed comments. The Irish Government said a press release would be issued covering the joint proposal. The UUP asked whether it was possible for the press release to be distributed to the participants. The British Government said this would be done.

7. The Chairman, on hearing no further comments, said he would adjourn the session. Before moving to this, he reminded participants about the revised schedule of meetings for the week and repeated what he had said earlier regarding public comment on the document and the fragility of the process at the present time. The Chairman added that a correspondingly high level of responsibility rested on the shoulders of the participants with regard to making progress in the process for all the people of Northern Ireland. This was the concluding phase of the process; there would be no further breaks. He hoped that this final series of negotiations could start in a spirit which was positive, thereby in due course helping to achieve a peaceful accommodation for all the people of Northern Ireland. With these comments the Chairman adjourned the meeting at 1634 until 1400 on 13 January.

Independent Chairmen Notetakers
14 January 1998

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