

NORTHERN IRELAND WOMEN'S COALITION

The Nature, Form and Extent of New Arrangements – Strand 1

1. The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition reiterates its belief that any new institutions and arrangements arising out of Strand 1 must
 - (i) formulate decision-making structures that are closer to people and local communities;
 - (ii) ensure that gender equality is secured through new electoral arrangements;
 - (iii) develop new arrangements for engaging the expertise of business, trade unions, the voluntary and community sector and other relevant sectors, alongside the directly elected representatives;
 - (iv) be capable of interfacing with, and developing a constructive and growing relationship with the UK regions, with the Republic of Ireland and with the European Union;
 - (v) have sufficient cross-community acceptance to be stable, but also have the potential for development and change.

- 1.2 We need to establish institutions that will attract candidates who have shunned political life in Northern Ireland, particularly women and other excluded minorities.

- 2.1 We thus advocate a Northern Ireland Assembly, which would return 110 members. These shall be elected from the current Westminster constituencies, each of which will return 5 members. There shall be 20 additional members elected from a regional list system. The 10 parties with the highest cumulative vote shall nominate 2 candidates by this route.

- 2.2 The Regional Assembly would have executive powers on delegated matters and advisory powers on non-delegated matters. Delegated matters would include:
 - (a) Education policy and administration
 - (b) Health policy and administration
 - (c) Environment/regional planning
 - (d) Transport policy and administration
 - (e) Housing policy and administration

- 2.3 The Assembly would thus have an advisory role in the following areas:
 - (i) Policing
 - (ii) Foreign policy
 - (iii) Taxraising
 - (iv) Powers of security

- 2.4 No person shall hold more than one elected office. In order to provide a meaningful link with central government there shall be a Special Standing Committee for Northern Ireland composed of a number of Northern Ireland Westminster MPs, proportional to their electoral strength and a number of Northern Ireland Assembly members proportional to their electoral strength. Where this system does not realise representation from each of the Assembly parties, provision shall be made for at least one member of each of the parties.
- 2.5 The Assembly will be presided over by a speaker. For the first five-year period the parties shall nominate and vote on a Speaker, who shall be an independent of international standing.
- 2.6 We envisage the executive elected from the Assembly being underpinned by the principle of powersharing, and having regard to the sufficiency of consensus model (as used in this Talks process) to assist with decision-making.
- 2.7 There shall be a Business Committee of the Assembly, which shall have an appropriate number of departmental sub-committees. In addition it will have a cross border liaison sub-committee.
- 3.1 Alongside the Assembly the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition would advocate a second chamber which offers the deepening of democratic participation. This will be elected on a collegiate basis drawn from sectors such as:
 - (i) Trade Unions
 - (ii) Employers/Agriculture
 - (iii) Voluntary Sector
 - (iv) Youth Sector
 - (v) Culture and the Arts
 - (vi) Educational Sector
- 3.2 Members of a series of agreed electoral colleges should elect this body, with 10 seats being elected from each on the basis of proportional representation.
- 3.3 The second house should consist of 50/50 male and female composition, with 5 representatives from each Electoral College being female.
- 3.4.1 The second house will adopt a role that is complementary to the work of the Assembly and will undertake consultative, monitoring, referral and representational functions. Where possible decisions will be taken by consensus. Procedure will be devised for situations where consensus cannot be reached. The second chamber will have a general duty to liaise formally and informally with the Assembly and the Secretary of State and to give advice.

- 3.5 The second chamber's role, powers, rights, duties and responsibilities will Include:
- (i) consideration of proposed legislation specifically referred to it under Assembly procedure (with power to accept, reject, give an opinion or propose amendments)
 - (ii) the ability to refer any proposed legislation for appropriate judicial consideration e.g. of whether it might be discriminatory or ultra-vires.
 - (iii) the approval of designated public appointments in respect of transferred matters and advising the Secretary of State on appointments within her responsibility.
 - (iv) the consideration of actions or proposals referred to it under Assembly procedures (with the power to give an opinion on or to make accommodations on such actions and to refer them for any appropriate judicial consideration).
 - (v) preparation of regular annual reports for the Assembly and the Secretary of State on the work of the second chamber and its view of the operation of the new political institutions.
- 3.6 The second chamber will have an important representational and promotional role, with a special commitment to the social and economic development of Northern Ireland.
- 3.7 The second chamber would secure its share of resources from the Secretary of State independently from the rest of the transferred block, in order to ensure that it had financial independence and its sources were sufficient to carry out the full range of its statutory functions.
- 4.1 The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition accepts the need for decision-making and administrative systems to contain a number of checks and balances to provide reassurance that new institutions would command the confidence of all sections of the Northern Ireland community. The Coalition recognises the need for all proposed structures to have due regard to this proposal.
- 5.1 The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition believes in the principle of subsidiarity in terms of decision-making consistent with due regard to the population of Northern Ireland and policy effectiveness. Thus the Coalition would advocate a case for rationalisation of current local government arrangements allowing for an appropriate allocation of powers, and the development of subsidiary community fora.

AGENDA ITEM 4

- 6.1 Relationships with other agenda items – The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition believes that it is essential that the proposed institutions and arrangements as outlined under Strand 1, should have clear lines of relationship with the other structures outlined under Strands 2 and 3.
- 6.2 The cross-border liaison sub-committee of the Assembly will have clear linkages with any cross-border bodies with decision-making powers and with the Northern Ireland Special Standing Committee in Westminster.