

Ulster Democratic Party

Strand One

Agenda Item 3

The deep divisions in Northern Ireland's society are at the heart of the past 30 years of conflict. These communal divisions can only be healed through new structures which provide a just and equitable framework for the relationship between all traditions in Northern Ireland. The foundation of any new arrangement must include the following: a Northern Ireland legislative body, devolution, elections based on proportional representation, a written constitution including a Bill of Rights and re-definition of Northern Ireland's relations with other regions of the UK.

A Northern Ireland legislative body is essential for the return to normality and democracy. Only by ending direct rule from Westminster and placing responsibility back into the hands of elected representatives of the people of Northern Ireland can all traditions co-operate and co-exist. Respect and tolerance go hand in hand with rights and responsibilities, and for rights and responsibilities to be exercised fully, control over Northern Ireland's affairs must return to the people of Northern Ireland.

The Government's commitment to devolution provides a broad and consequently stabilising framework for a Northern Ireland legislative body. Devolution enables different cultural and religious traditions to participate in the governance of the United Kingdom. Such participation strengthens rather than fragments the Union. But this strength requires a re-definition of all the relations within Northern Ireland. Devolution allows for diversity within unity.

The most equitable and democratic way for participation for all segments of society is proportional representation. Elections to the Northern Ireland legislative body should therefore be conducted on that basis. Past injustices of political disenfranchisement could then be redressed. Elections based on PR are essential for preventing a return to one party majority rule. A return to Stormont is unacceptable.

The creation of a new society can be best achieved by specifically guaranteeing cultural, religious and political rights for all traditions. A written constitution and a Bill of Rights would ensure exactly those rights which are crucial for peaceful co-existence. The new arrangements for Northern Ireland must protect civil liberties including the freedom of expression, religion and assembly in order to provide a solid foundation for democracy.

The nature, term and extent of new arrangements as outlined here are absolutely essential for healing the divisions in Northern Ireland society. They will be the basis for a lasting and stable relationship between all traditions in Northern Ireland as well as all regions of the UK. They present the absolute minimum required for a new just and equitable society for all.