

Strand Two Negotiations, 14 October 1997

Introductory Remarks by the

Minister for Foreign Affairs Mr. David Andrews, T.D.

Mr. Chairman,

May I take the opportunity of this, my first intervention at these negotiations, of conveying my greetings to the other delegations around the table and my thanks, Mr. Chairman, to you and your colleagues for your enormous commitment to this negotiating process.

As many of you will recall, I was involved in the previous round of negotiations in 1991-1992. Although we did not succeed on that occasion, there is no doubt that progress was achieved. The three-stranded format on which those talks were based has been carried over, as has the concept of negotiations involving both Governments and the eligible parties.

However, there are a number of innovations over the 1991-1992 talks which, I believe, give us grounds for greater optimism this time around.

First, is the fact that as a result of the loyalist and IRA ceasefires these negotiations take place against a background of peace. Second, and very importantly, the parties around the table represent almost the full range of public opinion in Northern Ireland. And thirdly Mr. Chairman, we have an expanded international involvement, in the person of yourself, Prime Minister Holkeri and General de Chastelain. I would like to express my appreciation for the generous and active support of the US, Finnish and Canadian Governments, both in the negotiations and in respect of the Independent Commission. In short, we now have a democratic political framework, with ceasefires in place, within which our differences can be negotiated.

Mr. Chairman,

Along with other participants, the Irish Government has responded to your invitation to submit a paper on the Principles and Requirements that we believe will be necessary to secure an

effective agreement on Strand Two issues.

In crafting these principles and requirements, we were not working in a void. We had available to us a series of documents, including the report of the New Ireland Forum, the Anglo-Irish Agreement, the Downing Street Declaration, the Joint Framework Document and the final paper of the Drafting Committee of the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation. Each of these papers has marked a stage in the evolution of a position which the Irish Government believes can provide a basis for the lasting political settlement to which we all aspire.

Those who have had the opportunity to read our paper will see that the very first principles which we have identified are "that all the people living on the island of Ireland have the right to peace, based on justice"; and "that the most urgent and important issue facing the people of Ireland, North and South, and the British and Irish Governments together, is to remove the causes of conflict, to overcome the legacy of history and to heal the divisions which have resulted". This is fundamental to the entire approach of the Irish Government to agreement on the future structures to be negotiated in this Strand.

I would emphasise also that lasting peace, if it is to be achieved, cannot be based on the assertion of the rights of one community over the other. It must be based on justice, parity of esteem and equality of treatment for all, including equitable treatment of the political loyalties and aspirations of each community. In particular we insist that stability and well-being will not be found under any political system, now or in the future, which is refused allegiance or rejected by a significant minority of those governed by it.

In our view, North/South institutions will form a crucial element of any agreement, not only because of the compelling economic justification which exists for them, but also because they will allow Northern nationalists the chance to share with unionists the sense that their aspirations and identity are reflected in the governance of their home place.

The principle of consent in all its aspects is, of course, crucial to this exercise. We will expect, therefore, any movement towards reconciliation on this island to be achieved openly and with the support of both communities and of a majority in both parts of the island.

Mr Chairman

I look forward to exploring with you and the other participants in the weeks ahead the various proposals which have been tabled on this and, indeed, all the agenda items in this Strand.

Thank you.