

NORTHERN IRELAND NEGOTIATIONS:

**STRAND THREE: 1st LIAISON MEETING  
28 OCTOBER 1997**

**Minutes**

1. The meeting commenced at 16.10, jointly chaired by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the Minister for Foreign Affairs.

**Introductory Remarks**

2. **The Secretary of State** welcomed the participants to the first meeting under the liaison arrangements provided for under Rules 39 and 40. The two Governments had so far had two meetings in Strand Three. These were relatively short and their main purpose had been to agree the paper of 14 October ("Strand Three - A New Agreement") which had been sent to all the parties. The paper provided a basis for consultation with the parties. Strand Three was essentially for the two Governments, but they were anxious to give the parties opportunities to offer their own views. The Governments wanted to make full use of the agreed liaison arrangements which allowed not only for regular meetings of this kind, but for each of the parties, either independently or together, to confer with either or both Governments and to put forward their own views. The two Governments intended to take very seriously the requirement under Rule 40 that each Government should explain its own views on points put by the parties and to take full account of those points.

3. The joint paper recalled that, as signatories of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, the two Governments had made it clear that in the context of a comprehensive political settlement, they were prepared to consider a new

and more broadly based agreement if that could be achieved through direct discussion and negotiation between all the parties concerned. The paper then invited the views of the parties on the principles and requirements which might underpin any new agreement. The paper mentioned, for example, the principles of self-determination and consent. The paper also invited their views on other important elements of Strand Three, including constitutional issues; the design of new East/West institutions; the wider relationship between new North/South institutions and new structures in Northern Ireland, the European Union, and possibly other devolved institutions in the UK; and rights and safeguards.

4. The two governments would welcome the parties' initial reactions to the paper and would also be glad to receive any further views in writing.

5. **The Minister for Foreign Affairs** also welcomed the parties. While the negotiations in Strand Three were for the two Governments, they placed great store on the views of the parties. The joint paper invited the views of the parties on the issues which would be raised in Strand Three. The two Governments were prepared to contemplate a new and more broadly based agreement reflecting the totality of relationships. The Irish Government were anxious to ensure the fullest possible consultation with the parties on Strand Three matters. They were prepared to meet the parties bilaterally or multilaterally, or to receive views in writing, and would take full account of any views expressed.

#### **Comments from the Parties**

6. **The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition** summarised proposals for Strand Three institutions made in a paper which they subsequently circulated.

7. **The UUP** said that Strand Three was inextricably linked with Strand Two and the outcome of the negotiations would have to reflect that. They

looked forward to regular Strand Three liaison meetings and to bilaterals with the Governments. They hoped that the two Governments would indeed take account of the views of the parties.

8. Offering some general comments on the joint paper, the UUP observed that paragraph 1 was largely based on paragraph 39 of the Framework Document. The latter, however, was primarily concerned with North/South relations. East/West relations took up a mere 5 lines. (Paragraph 43) - in contrast to the emphasis on the "totality of relationships" in the summit communiqué agreed by Mr Haughey and Mrs Thatcher in December 1980. This scaling down of the emphasis on the East/West relationship was fundamentally unacceptable to Unionists.

9. **The UUP** did not view Northern Ireland as a unique conflict situation. Moreover, they saw nothing in common between the approach to conflict resolution adopted by the EU and that outlined in the Framework Document. The Governments had invited parties to consider paragraphs 14 - 21 of the Framework Document, which called for a balanced accommodation of the views of the two main traditions. But the UUP considered the views of one tradition to be based on an aspiration while those of the other were based on a legal status under international law.

10. **Sinn Fein** said that they had submitted a paper setting out their comments. They believed that the status quo had failed and that the negotiations should be directed towards a new dispensation. The UUP had indicated that they would not accept all-Ireland structures. They had to accept, however, that there was no nationalist consent for the status quo and face up to the reality of the need for change and for constructive engagement to bring that about. It was necessary for the two Governments to drive the process forward.

11. **The SDLP** said that the negotiations were based on the need to address the three sets of relationships as the key to finding a solution. The energies of all the participants should be devoted to promoting agreement across the three Strands. The most important framework of all was that of the two Governments working together to solve the problem.

12. The Framework Document had been about using EU methods to resolve the problem. It was necessary to create institutions and structures which accommodated both traditions while respecting their differences.

13. **The PUP** sought clarification of the third tiret of paragraph 6 of the joint paper. **The Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Secretary of State** explained that this meant only that co-operation would continue between the two Governments on subjects not devolved to new Northern Ireland institutions. In response to follow-up queries from the PUP, **the Secretary of State** undertook to provide further clarification after the meeting.

14. **Sinn Fein** suggested that the Unionist parties appeared not to accept the proposition in paragraph 1 of the joint paper, that the outcome of negotiations needed the agreement of all the people on the island of Ireland. The UUP must face up to the reality that the problem lay in the island of Ireland and accept the need for real change.

15. **The UDP** urged the other parties to use Strand Three Liaison meetings to seek the views of the Governments, not to engage in arguments with each other.

16. **The SDLP** criticised the UUP approach to the negotiations, pressed for substantive engagement on the real issues and underlined the need for ways to be found of bringing the discussions into some kind of focus.

17. **The Secretary of State and the Minister for Foreign Affairs** concluded the meeting by inviting those parties which wished to do so to submit papers within a week, or to put forward their views in bilateral or multilateral meetings. In the light of that, and in consultation with the Business Committee, the two Governments would convene a further Strand Three Liaison meeting.