

Progressive Unionist Party
of Northern Ireland

Principles and Requirements of Confidence Building
In Relation to Political Prisoners

Confidence building measures in relation to those who have been imprisoned as a direct result of the conflict should be implemented as an unsolicited gesture of goodwill by Her Majesty's Government with the support of all parties to these talks and this committee in particular. Such measures ought not to be granted as rewards for the action, or the inaction, of the organisations to which the prisoners belong; neither should they be regarded as concessions made to keep the political representatives of the prisoners on board the peace process.

Confidence building measures should be applied indiscriminately to both loyalist and republican prisoners, and to others who may have been imprisoned as a direct result of their involvement in the conflict we have all endured and suffered.

We must acknowledge the fact that there are many people in our communities who will not regard gestures of goodwill towards prisoners as building confidence with them and this important issue must be addressed in a sensitive manner. The responsibility for this lies with those of us present, who must acknowledge that the release of prisoners is an essential ingredient of the process of which we are involved and as such must prepare our respective communities for such releases.

Confidence building should be initiated by those who have the power to impart confidence and should be about engaging constructively with others as to how appropriate measures may be identified and implemented. Consequently we believe that Her Majesty's Government should initiate the process and engage constructively with the various prisoner groups and/or their political representatives. The Progressive Unionist Party is ready to help facilitate such dialogue between HMG and the UVF/Red Hand prisoners.

As we are all required to exercise responsibility for addressing each others needs in relating to confidence building all parties to these Talks ought to engage constructively in the discussion about the needs of prisoners and their families in relation to confidence building. All parties likewise, ought to play a constructive

role in assisting HMG to identify and implement appropriate measures. This will ensure that all of us have a sense of ownership of the process.

If we present are honest and sincere about our involvement in this process, we must acknowledge that it is likely that we will come up against measures that will appear destabilising to us but are measures of confidence building for others and vice versa. It is therefore important and essential that we acknowledge these measures and discuss and assist each other in the preparation and addressing of our respective communities to be able to accept them or at best understand their need. This applies to everyone present.

With reference to (3) above, we recognise that there is a requirement on all of us to address the fears and apprehensions of those who have been bereaved or traumatised as a consequence of the conflict that we are hopefully emerging from. We mention this in anticipation that such people will be used to prevent the release of prisoners.

We recognise and acknowledge that these are issues and circumstances that need to be addressed. We remind all present that they need to be addressed sensibly and objectively. It is important that we do not get drawn into the emotions that surround these issues. We do not under any circumstances intend to minimise these emotions.

The PUP's objectives is to turn these emotions from being used negatively to being positively addressed. Part of the positive nature is to ensure that we embark on a process, of healing the damage and that can begin by dealing with obvious sores and embarking on preventative medicines. In the present context and topic we are addressing, there are obvious sores and medicinal cures. There are also different illnesses that need different treatments. These should have the right to be addressed separately and independant to other issues.

It is important in this process that we acknowledge the difficulties we are dealing with are the result of a previous Labour governments attempts to Criminalise and Ulsterise the conflict here. As a consequence of this attempt, it makes it more difficult for certain constituencies to, accept the existence of the conflict and therefore all that is required to address the conflict that took place. Prisoners being one of those. Admitting such errors existed may be able to assist others to address

issues such as prisoners in a more honest light such as conflict transformation.

We as representatives of the PUP on this confidence building liaison committee are aware that papers have been forwarded by interested parties on how prisoners should be released and prisoners issues addressed. We do not wish to embark upon the process of making or repeating those requests, though we are certainly prepared to discuss all of them. The difficulties there are in achieving them and how they can be achieved without undermining other confidence's or appearing to be concessions to unreasonable people.

The Progressive Unionist Party is very much aware of how important the prisoners issues are in this process and are prepared to work to meet they objectives we recognise need to be achieved. I hope all here are as sincere in every aspect of this process as we are. Thank you.

(The Progressive Unionist Party suggests that this may be done within the context of restorative justice and would be willing to facilitate a presentation on the principles and practice of Restorative Justice at a special sitting of the Confidence Building Committee.)