

REPORT FROM THE LIAISON SUB-COMMITTEE ON DECOMMISSIONING

Three formal meetings of the Sub Committee have been held to date. The first meeting held on 8 October 1997 examined the remit of the International Body with regard to the legislative requirements of both States. It also gave the parties an opportunity to outline their initial views and thoughts with only the NIWC raising the issue of the high level of legally held arms in Northern Ireland.

The second meeting held on 17 November 1997 was advised by the Chairman that the Report from the Independent International Commission on Decommission (hereafter "The Commission") was not yet ready for distribution. All of the parties expressed their disappointment and concern that the report was unavailable. Each reaffirmed their view that the Report should be distributed prior to the next meeting so that parties could prepare introductory comments. Both Governments then provided briefings on their primary legislation, Section by Section, and outlined the methodology for incorporation of the schemes, when agreed, into Statute. In terms of the British Government this can be done by Order of Council but the Irish situation is more drawn-out in that secondary legislation will have to be presented to the Oireachtas.

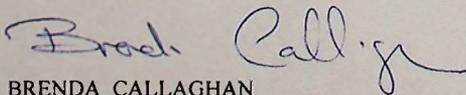
The Initial Report of The Commission was released on 21 November 1997. The NIWC along with the majority of other parties at a Meeting held on 25 November 1997 welcomed its contents. It should be noted that none of the participants had suggested any additional methods of decommissioning other than the four contained in the original proposal of the International Body. A debate occurred over a Sinn Fein presentation that indicated that the International Commission should also look at the "source or supplier" of weapons. General de Chastelain indicated that The Commission did not intend to act outside its remit which was clearly defined in the Governing Legislation and had been outlined at a previous meeting of the Sub Committee. It was agreed that parties should give further consideration to the Report and that The Commission would meet with each party shortly.

Pearl and myself discussed the Sinn Fein approach with them after the meeting and they advised that they were seeking confirmation that the British Government or Agents thereof had previously armed loyalist paramilitaries. They saw examination of the "sourcing" as a guarantee against reoccurrence. We advised that we believed that this approach would not achieve their desired results and suggested that the Confidence Building Committee was the more appropriate forum for that particular debate.

A Meeting between The Commission and the NIWC was held on 2 December 1997. General de Chastelain advised that given the "feed-back", particularly from those with direct interest in the subject, The Commission would be focusing on the latter two options in their report. This would provide for Weapons etc., being collected by the Government or designated representatives from information provided by paramilitary groups or alternatively they would be destroyed by the groups themselves with verification by The Commission. At the Meeting we raised the issues of Public Safety, the need for using Independent Experts who are considered as neutral (we suggested that they should operate under an UN or EU Flag), the requirement to secure confidentiality around the informer and some other procedural points. We also expressed our concerns over the use of Government agencies with regard to the confidentiality and independence aspects. The Commission agreed to consider our comments and we reserved the right to speak with them again after we had given further consideration to the Report and consulted with our members and other parties.

Please accept Pearl and my apologies for non-attendance at the Coalition Meeting to be held on Tuesday 9 December 1997. We will expand on the above at the next meeting but if anyone would like clarification in the meantime please phone me.

Merry Christmas and a peaceful New Year to everyone,



BRENDA CALLAGHAN