

Combined Loyalist Military Command Belfast.

25th August

We welcome recent Government moves, however belatedly, in relation to the restoration of remission scales and review of life-sentences in response to the ceasefires but feel that they have not gone far enough. However, we recognise the spirit of intent and that this is the beginning of a process which the C.L.M.C. will be closely monitoring.

For multiple reasons, politically motivated prisoners are a vital component in the Peace and Political equations and the sooner this is realised in particular circles the sooner we can move on and build upon what has already been achieved.

We are cognisant of governmental appreciation of UDP / PUP input these past months in relation to positive and possible ways forward and recognition of their role in future dialogue.

Normalisation in the true sense of the word will not begin to take place in Northern Ireland until talks are convened so that, face-to-face, the democratic Political process can converge with the Peace process without the threat of an imminent or eventual return to violence from any quarter if democratic dialogue does not reach their ultimate expectations.

On the 7th July the CLMC publicly questioned whether the IRA were intent on maintaining their ceasefire. In the light of recent events we have still to be convinced.

The clear orchestration of repeated attacks upon the Protestant tradition and heritage during the past year has caused deep concern among our community. A concern which we share. However, Loyalists are still prepared to search for a purely democratic resolution to the conflict.

The CLMC remains firmly committed to the defence of the Ulster people from militant Republicanism and, while the IRA's commitment to peace remains questionable, Loyalists must remain prepared.

The CLMC wish to re-assure the people of N.I. that provided their rights are upheld the CLMC will not initiate a return to war. **There shall be no first strike.**

For its part the Government has erected a seemingly impenetrable barrier by insisting upon the decommissioning of war materials. The retention of weaponry by the CLMC is a purely defensive measure. We are committed to removing the cause for the retention of arms in our society and thereby removing forever the gun from Ulster politics.

However, much will be dependent on the mutual establishment of goodwill, trust and confidence between all concerned.

It is inconceivable for the CLMC to de-commission weapons with a fully operational, heavily armed Republican war machine intact and refusing to relinquish their arsenals.

We shall continue to monitor this aspect of the process with the utmost vigilance.