

FAO Avila (4 pages total)

15th March 1999

Dear

In the context of moving to intensive negotiations next week, the Women's Coalition is currently formulating its position vis-à-vis the necessary steps for the establishment of the Northern Ireland government.

In order to do so, we feel it would be useful to clarify the positions of other participants who are committed to making the Agreement work. Many of us have made public statements that have been widely, and variously, interpreted. We are keen to explore the meaning of some of these, and to try to outline what would be possible for different parties in relation to resolution of this issue.

It is our view that, while, technically there is no linkage between the formation of an executive and the decommissioning of paramilitary arms, the political fact is that both technical and moral components must be taken in account in the resolution of this issue.

We would therefore greatly appreciate it if you could respond to the queries we have attached.

We look forward to your response, and to working with you in the next few weeks to resolve this issue.

Yours sincerely,

Monica McWilliams
Jane Morrice

- TG SF
1. We accept that the Good Friday Agreement is more generalist with regard to decommissioning than has been presented in the political framework in the last year. Nonetheless we believe that the overall process is in danger of failing if a process of decommissioning does not commence. What aspects of that process do you believe to be possible?
 2. Might there be merit in exploring the option of allowing arms dumps which have been contaminated – either by the British security forces, the RUC, the Garda surveillance or dissident members access or theft - to be verified as to their non-use by the Independent Commission on Decommissioning or another agreed independent agent?
 3. In terms of developing a process, would there be merit in inserting an intermediate layer, whereby a trusted intermediary would verify such sealed dumps, and report the fact on a relatively frequent basis to the ICD without necessarily revealing the location to the ICD? If this situation prevailed for say, 6 months, and there was sufficient political progress, the location could be revealed as a signal of good faith.
 4. What is your view on the First Minister Designate's recent speech that signalled a new, central, emphasis on the issue of tackling fair employment and other equality issues?
 5. Given the political (and semantic) connotations around the decommissioning issue, are there any other conceptual approaches that you have identified as being useful in this context?
 6. What definition of "decommissioning" are you using to guide your position?

To: *unp*

1. Our reading is that Sinn Fein's entry to government is not predicated on the IRA decommissioning its weaponry. A strict reading of the Agreement requires parties to "use any influence they may have, to achieve decommissioning of all paramilitary arms within two years following endorsements in referendums North and South and in the context of the implementation of the overall settlement."
In our view Sinn Fein have been using "any influence they may have" to do so. On what basis have you elaborated your position in this regard?
2. What would your position be should Sinn Fein bring to judicial review any decision to exclude them from executive office on the grounds that the IRA has not commenced decommissioning? Would you accept any consequent court ruling?
3. The commencement of the decommissioning process has been cited as the final obstacle to the formation of an executive. Should such a process be commenced would there be any more obstacles to the formation of an executive?
4. What definition of "decommissioning" are you using to guide your position?

To all others.

1. In your view is there a linkage between the establishment of an executive in Northern Ireland and the decommissioning of paramilitary arms?
2. What definition of "decommissioning" are you using to guide your position?
3. The requirement in the Agreement for parties to "use any influence they may have, to achieve decommissioning of all paramilitary arms within two years following endorsements in referendums North and South and in the context of the implementation of the overall settlement" seems to us to have been adhered to by members of Sinn Fein. On what basis have you elaborated your position in this regard?

1. In your view is there a linkage between the establishment of an executive in Northern Ireland and the decommissioning of paramilitary arms?
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