

The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition is a strong adherent to and advocate of the Good Friday Agreement (GFA).

It wants decommissioning to take place, and believes the GFA provides a framework by which it can take place. Paragraph 3 speaks to what is required from participants in the process, paragraph 4 what is required of the Independent Commission on Decommissioning (headed up by General de Chastelain) and paragraph 6(sic) commits the government to various activities.

The participants "accordingly reaffirm their commitment to the total disarmament of all paramilitary organisations. They also confirm their intention to continue to work constructively and in good faith with the Independent Commission, and to use any influence they may have, to achieve the decommissioning of all paramilitary arms within two years following endorsement in referendums North and South of the agreement and in the context of the implementation of the overall settlement."

While there is an obligation to decommission by May 2000, there is, however, no linkage between the decommissioning of paramilitary arms and the establishment of a Northern Ireland executive, or government. We believe that decommissioning will only take place if it is a voluntary activity.

It may be difficult to see decommissioning take place in the context of the GFA, but it will definitely not take place outside of the GFA. All parties are responsible for decommissioning to happen. That means working on the conditions and the political environment in which it will voluntarily take place.

It is important to bear in mind the view of George Mitchell in his Independent Report on Decommissioning that the most important form of decommissioning is the decommissioning of mind-sets. Decommissioning is thus not just about weapons, but also about attitudes to each other. Building trust is an important component of creating the conditions for voluntary decommissioning.

*References: Decommissioning par. 1-6 pg. 20 Good Friday Agreement
Independent Report on Decommissioning January 1997*