

4 May 99

Note from NI Women's Coalition

Process

1. The NIWC understands the importance of bilateral and trilateral negotiations in respect of the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement (GFA). It would be keen to ensure, however, that a firm sense of collective responsibility and an inclusive process is maintained.
2. The NIWC feels that it is essential that the process of negotiation is credible and transparent to all those involved. Short-term crisis management cannot be allowed to undermine the building of long-term confidence, trust and a sense of clarity.
3. Given that the two Governments are the more powerful signatories to the GFA, the Coalition feels that their role in the effective implementation of the GFA cannot be equated with that of other parties, and consequently, the NIWC supports the momentum created by the Secretary of State and the Taoiseach in implementing aspects of the GFA. The NIWC would oppose any delays or blockages in the course of this implementation.
4. The Coalition feels that any 'parking' of the negotiations around the implementation of the Agreement over the summer period would create a dangerous political vacuum and should be avoided.

Product

1. The NIWC believes that the GFA must be both safeguarded and implemented in its entirety, without any additional gloss or caveat. Paras 1-6 in the Declaration of Support are seen by the NIWC as being the key to this process.
2. There is little trust between the communities in Northern Ireland; thus it is unrealistic to expect either of the two main communities to make a concession that goes beyond the stated terms of the GFA. It is the NIWC's view that there is no clear linkage in the GFA between prior decommissioning of weapons and the establishment of an Executive. We do, nevertheless, accept the importance of the provisions outlined in paragraphs 1-6 of the Decommissioning section of the GFA. If the issue of 'decommissioning' is still to be resolved by May 2000, parties should be asked to give an account of how they have met the requirements outlined in the section.
3. It may be necessary to bring the 4 year review forward to May 2000, and to designate the period May 1999 to May 2000 as a Transitional Executive and governance. In such circumstances the NIWC would favour the Secretary of State implementing the d'Hondt system to determine the Transitional Ministers. A Transitional Executive will be convened which will in turn trigger the implementation of the other constitutional arrangements provided for under the GFA.

4. It may be necessary to review the powers delegated to the members of the transitional Executive so that the North South Ministerial Council and the British Irish Council can be brought into existence. Over the period of the Transitional Executive it may be necessary to maintain the Secretary of State and existing Ministerial presence in Northern Ireland.
5. If sufficient trust is engendered at any point in the period May 1999 and May 2000, then a motion to translate the transitional arrangements into a standing Executive can be brought forward by a cross-community vote in the Assembly and ratified by the Secretary of State.
6. During the transitional period the Chairs and Deputy Chairs of the Assembly Committees should be allocated on the d'Hondt system.

Other Issues

1. The Coalition is concerned that any suggested Day of Reconciliation (admirable though the concept is in theory) might become divisive given the sensitivities amongst the many different victims of violence. Instead the NIWC would like to see a programmed Peacebuilding Process introduced at a community level which would be coterminous with the transitional period of governance.