

2 July 1999

THE WAY FORWARD

## A JOINT STATEMENT BY THE BRITISH AND IRISH GOVERNMENTS

After five days of discussion, the British and Irish Governments have put to all the parties a way forward to establish an inclusive Executive, and to decommission arms.

These discussions have been difficult. But as they conclude, the peace process is very much alive, and on track. The Good Friday Agreement presents the best chance of peace and prosperity in decades. It is clear from our discussions that nobody wants to throw that opportunity away.

We believe that both unionist and nationalist opinion will see that our approach meets their concerns, and will support it accordingly.

The way forward is as follows:

1. All parties reaffirm the three principles agreed on 25 June
  - an inclusive Executive exercising devolved powers;
  - decommissioning of all paramilitary arms by May 2000;
  - decommissioning to be carried out in a manner determined by the International Commission on Decommissioning.
2. The D'Hondt procedure to nominate Ministers to be run on 15 July.
3. The Devolution Order to be laid before the British Parliament on 16 July to take effect on 18 July. Within the period specified by the de Chastelain Commission, the Commission will confirm a start to the process of decommissioning, that start to be defined as in their report of 2 July.
4. As described in their report today, the Commission will have urgent discussions with the groups' points of contact. The Commission will specify that actual

decommissioning is to start within a specified time. They will report progress in September and December 1999 and in May 2000.

5. A "failsafe" clause: the Governments undertake that, in accordance with the review provisions of the Agreement, if commitments under the Agreement are not met, either in relation to decommissioning or to devolution, they will automatically, and with immediate effect, suspend the operation of the institutions set up by the Agreement. In relation to decommissioning, this action will be taken on receipt of a report at any time that the commitments now being entered into or steps which are subsequently laid down by the Commission, are not fulfilled, in accordance with the Good Friday Agreement. The British Government will legislate to this effect.

All parties have fought very hard to ensure their basic concerns have been met. This means that we are now closer than ever to a fulfilling the promise of the Good Friday Agreement:

- a government for Northern Ireland in which the two traditions work together in a devolved administration;
- new North-South and British-Irish institutions;
- the decommissioning of paramilitary arms;
- constitutional change;
- equality, justice, human rights, and the normalisation of Northern Ireland society.

All sides have legislative safeguards to ensure that commitments entered into are met.

This is an historic opportunity. Now is the time to seize it.