

DRAFT RECORD OF OPENING PLENARY SESSION - WEDNESDAY 12 JUNE 1996
(00.32)

Those present:

Independent Chairmen	Government Teams	Parties
Senator Mitchell	British Government	Alliance Party
General de Chastelain	Irish Government	Labour Party
Mr Holkeri		Northern Ireland Women's Coalition
		Progressive Unionist Party
		Social Democratic and Labour Party
		Ulster Democratic Party
		Ulster Democratic Unionist Party
		United Kingdom Unionist Party
		Ulster Unionist Party

1. At 00.32 hours Senator Mitchell and his two colleagues took their seats in the main Conference Room. The DUP raised strong objections to this situation and stated that no opportunity had been afforded to the party to agree the appointment of Senator Mitchell as Chairman of the Plenary. The DUP said that it was for all participants to agree all issues under discussion and that no matters, including the appointment of Chairmen, should be imposed by the two Governments. The DUP stated that the Secretary of State and his officials had deliberately avoided visiting their rooms to let the party know about an impending Plenary Session. The DUP restated the point that the ultimate say in the appointment of any Chairmen belonged to the participants and therefore the party strongly objected to Senator Mitchell being put into the Chair without any opportunity to voice an opinion. With those comments the DUP delegation departed from the Conference Room at 00.36 hours. The UKUP delegation also left the Conference Room at this time.

2. The Chairman then read from a prepared text. Following the conclusion of his introductory remarks he indicated to delegates that he now wished to move forward to the point whereby all participants were to make a formal declaration making clear their total and absolute commitment to the International Body's principles of democracy and non-violence. The Chairman stated that he intended to read the Principles aloud and then ask both Governments and all participants to affirm their commitment to them. The following participants then affirmed their commitment to the Mitchell Principles in the manner outlined in the Report of the International Body:-

(a) The British Government.

(b) The Irish Government.

(c) The Alliance Party;

(d) The Labour Party;

(e) The NI Women's Coalition;

(f) The Progressive Unionist Party;

(g) The Social Democratic and Labour Party;;

(h) The Ulster Democratic Party;

(i) There was no response from the Ulster Democratic Unionist Party;

(j) There was no response from the United Kingdom Unionist Party;

(k) The Ulster Unionist Party

3. The UUP expressed regret that both Governments had not yet put the legal steps in place to support commitment of the Principles even though it had made representations to the Irish on this point in early March.

4. The Chairman deleted the names of the parties who did not respond but directed that the press be told that this deletion did not reflect a refusal on their part to sign up to the Principles - merely their absence from the proceedings

5. The Chairman requested the participants to return at 11.00 am later that morning to resume the informal discussion on procedural rules and the agenda for the remainder of the Opening Plenary session. The Chairman then proposed an adjournment of the Plenary Session until noon on 19 June 1996. The SDLP referred to the fact that some delegations might have to travel long distances and asked that the restart time be extended to 13.00. The UUP said that although it had sympathies with the SDLP's point, its preference would be for discussions to commence at 11.00 am. The SDLP withdrew its proposal.

6. The Chairman then indicated that while it might appear that there was a calendar week available, in practice, official duties for some elsewhere would reduce the time for informal discussion considerably. The Chairman considered it might be appropriate, to enable better progress to be made, for the numbers in delegations to be reduced. The Chairman said that with limited time available delegates should be prepared to devote as much time as possible so

that work on both rules and agenda could be completed by 19 June. The UUP then referred to the temporary absence of two of the parties. The Chairman agreed that these parties could return for the purposes of the informal discussions on rules and agenda. The Chairman stated that both parties would have to give the same commitment to the Principles of non-violence and democracy and make the affirmation already made by all the other delegations in the appropriate manner.

7. The Chairman then read out the text of a prepared press statement. There were no objections to the text.

8. Finally, the Alliance Party enquired from the British Government whether the meeting of the Forum scheduled for that Friday was still on. The British Government confirmed that it was. The Chairman thanked the participants for attending and adjourned the Plenary Session until 12.00 noon on 19 June 1996.

Independent Chairmen Notetakers
13 June 1996

OIC/PS2