

DRAFT SUMMARY RECORD OF OPENING PLENARY SESSION - The Chairman,
MONDAY 21 OCTOBER 1996 (12.08)

Those present:

Independent Chairmen	Government Teams	Parties
Mr Holkeri	British Government	Alliance Party
General de Chastelain	Irish Government	Labour
		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. The Chairman convened the meeting at 12.08 and stated that four draft records had been circulated to participants on Friday past. He now wished to approve these.
2. The DUP said it required more time to study the minutes before giving approval. The UKUP concurred with the DUP comments. The Chairman said that the four records would be approved at the start of the following day's plenary session. The Chairman then invited participants to move on to item 2 on the agenda. The UUP asked the Chairman for an indication of the day's timetable. The Chairman replied saying that he had envisaged this session lasting for around 90 minutes. A break for lunch would be taken and the session would not continue beyond 18.00. However all this was a matter for the participants who had the final say on timings. The DUP proposed a lunch break at around 13.15 as it was involved in another important meeting away from the talks a short time after that. The Chairman indicated that the DUP was first on his list

to speak so the timing element was in its hands. The Chairman, however, suggested a break for lunch at 13.00. This was agreed.

3. The DUP said there was one matter which it wished to deal with before moving on to its address on decommissioning. It said that a member of the media had approached the party outside the gates that morning, seeking to confirm a story that it had not yet submitted a paper on decommissioning. The DUP believed this story to have come from the UUP leader. It deeply regretted that this had been said to the media.

4. The UUP said that its leader had not spoken to the media for the entire morning, therefore the DUP accusation was entirely wide of the mark. The party sought an apology and said it was quite prepared to go out to the media and establish the veracity of the statement now made. The DUP, in reply, then said that it believed the comment, received by the media, had come from someone in the UUP, not necessarily its leader. However whichever way one looked at the incident, it appeared that the rules of confidentiality were rules for everyone bar the UUP. The DUP said it had made it clear during a previous plenary session that the party would be preparing two papers. One, a position paper, would be submitted that day; the second, containing proposals for decommissioning would be produced at a later date, once the party had heard other contributions in the debate. Following a question from the UUP, the DUP stated that it was content to withdraw the earlier comment regarding the UUP leader. It did, however, stand by its second statement that someone from the UUP had given the story to the media. The UUP said that another one of its representatives had spoken to the media on two occasions that morning, but had never mentioned anything about the DUP and its decommissioning papers.

the DUP on 14 October 1996 and said that it would be sending a

Again the UUP said it was quite happy to go outside and verify this statement.

5. The UKUP stated that, on the issue of confidentiality, the Chairman should now accept that a "coach and four" was being driven through the rules on frequent occasions. Everyone was now stating openly to the media matters which shouldn't be discussed in this manner. The UKUP said that in the early hours of the previous Tuesday it had not spoken to the media on departure from the building, but then found, by breakfast-time that morning, that a number of statements had already been made. The party said it also believed the UUP was updating its members on the talks process by issuing regular bulletins which appeared to be widely available. The UKUP said it would be supplying copies of these bulletins to the Chairman in order that he might make his own decision on their content within the rules of procedure.

6. The UUP said these bulletins were just internal party memorandums. The UKUP replied saying that these documents were being distributed like handbills and were available to members of the public. The UUP described the UKUP statement as nonsense and sought confirmation from it that it (the UKUP) had handed out documents to the media during the course of the previous Monday/Tuesday sessions. The UKUP confirmed that it had provided additional copies to those already in circulation with the media. The UUP said their bulletins were not handbills and no one could expect a political party to stop communicating with its members on relevant issues. Following a question from the SDLP, the PUP suggested that the whole debate on this be set aside for another time to enable the DUP to address the session on decommissioning. The DUP referred to a statement made in the House of Commons by the UUP on 14 October 1996 and said that it would be sending a

copy of this to the Chairman who could then decide whether the contents were a breach of confidentiality. The Chairman noted this, stating that the chair, as always, remained a servant of the participants.

7. The DUP said that in relation to decommissioning, it wanted to make several introductory remarks about both the talks and the general political process and how these had developed thus far. The DUP said that the whole process was being operated on a pre-determined agenda by both Governments. The contents of papers produced so far were totally unacceptable to those who voted for the DUP. All of this was an attack on the union and a loosening of ties between Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom. The DUP then stated that the process forced a pre-determined Chairman on the participants. The Government said at that point that this would be the last time anything would be forced on the parties. The DUP recalled the British Prime Minister's comments on 10 June, at the beginning of the talks, when he stated that the process belonged to the participants and nothing would be forced on them. The DUP said the reason for having a pre-determined Chairman was to boost public opinion in the USA during an election year, thereby giving the Clinton administration greater foreign policy credibility. Now the Chairman had returned to the USA because first things came first at this time of an election year.

8. The DUP moved on and stated that Sinn Fein/IRA's position was also pre-determined. It was evident that no real decision would be taken on decommissioning and that the issue would only be addressed through a "fourth strand" committee, reporting in the December. The DUP said everyone knew that there was a pre-determined outcome to the talks. There was no democracy in the structures set up to bring the talks process into being. The DUP

said it had debated this point with the British Government. It (the British Government) had said that the smaller parties wouldn't have equal support to the larger participants - yet procedures didn't reflect this. The DUP then demonstrated a recent example of how the procedures on sufficient consensus had worked out by listing how parties had lined up on certain votes. The UDP intervened at this stage, pointing out that the DUP had not called its name out correctly. After a further exchange between both parties, the DUP continued saying that the views of the community were not fully reflected in the process. The majority of both communities was what had to be taken into account in any "consensus" reached. This meant that the UDP/PUP had to be taken as representing the unionist view, but the DUP were not so sure that this in fact should be the case. The DUP then moved on to talk about the Forum in Belfast. The PUP intervened at this point, seeking clarification as to the relevance of the last DUP comments with regard to item 2 on the agenda. The Chairman stated that each speaker had the right to make comments in which ever way they chose. It was therefore not possible to rule these remarks out of order.

9. The DUP said it was strange that the participants should adopt this approach. It seemed to be the case that the PUP did not want the meeting to deal with these issues, but the DUP maintained that it was quite correct for it to raise them for the consideration of the parties present. The DUP said that according to the PUP the Framework Document was acceptable to 99% of unionists. However, the position was that the other pro-union parties had rejected it totally and absolutely. To balance the so-called unionist majority, the Forum was established as part of the electoral process but the SDLP had found it to be unacceptable. Sinn Fein would not even participate; they didn't

want a debate on the issues. The SDLP said it would not countenance a unionist majority but that would turn out to be the case in any event on the basis of any election in Northern Ireland.

10. The DUP also said that it was strange that Strand one issues were contained within the agenda item under discussion. There had been assurances by the British Government that the Irish Government would not be involved with such issues. Furthermore, the meeting was discussing where to start on Strand one issues on the basis of settlement of the agenda on a vote with the involvement of the Irish Government. They were keen to see the agenda adopted to affect the discussions on Strand one. What has happened was a charade, according to the DUP. The party then referred to the documents dealing with the agenda for the remainder of the Opening Plenary Session which had been considered and agreed the previous week. First there was the draft document circulated by the Chairman under the provisions of Rule 30, supposedly after consultation with the participants. The DUP had to point out that there was no consultation and the document should be withdrawn accordingly. Then a second document was presented by the SDLP/UUP. The DUP was not consulted about that document either. A third draft proposed by five other parties starting with Alliance (in alphabetical order) was circulated and that process had led ultimately to adoption of the agenda by a strange route. Then Alliance and the SDLP put forward a procedural motion, which the DUP said, was preposterous. It wondered how many more such motions were going to be made to gag or stymie contributions.

11. The DUP then went on to deal with the history of the decommissioning issue. It said that the people of Northern

Ireland had been told by the SDLP and IRA/Sinn Fein that there was no such thing in Irish nationalism as a tradition of decommissioning. That was stretching Irish history. It was not so and the statement represented a colossal lie. The position was that in 1923 de Valera ordered a cease-fire and sought a peace conference with W T Cosgrave. Cosgrave said that all political action within the country should be based on the recognition of two principles viz;

- a) that all political issues should be decided by majority vote, and
- b) that all lethal weapons should be under effective control by the appropriate authorities.

The DUP endorsed both of these principles. It said it was a pity that they were not being supported today.

12. The party considered that there was great irony in the British Government's response to the report by Lord Cullen in relation to gun control in the UK following the tragedy in Dunblane. It was hypocrisy, the DUP maintained, to call in legal guns when the Government cannot bring in the illegal weapons in the hands of the paramilitaries. It was, perhaps, good publicity in England to make such a decision, but it had to be remembered what suffering the people of Northern Ireland had endured because of terrorists' weapons. In the context of Irish history, as a result of the firm line taken by Mr Cosgrave, Mr de Valera had to dump illegal weapons and some ten years later entered into Government. The Government of the day had succeeded in avoiding further bloodshed through firm executive action under Kevin O'Higgins. Firm tactics should now be employed against Sinn

Fein/IRA who are unwilling to accept the principle of consent and the need for decommissioning.

13. The DUP said that the SDLP and the Irish Government started the debate on decommissioning. In the previous talks, the SDLP said that there should be no guns on the table, under it, or outside the door. This was the baseline of the guns issue. The SDLP was not the first to make such a statement. As far back as 15 November 1931, Mr Costello said that the repeal of the External Relations Act would take the guns out of Irish politics and the country would be completely independent under a Republican Government. The DUP pointed to the slaughter which had taken place in the intervening period, underlining the need to remove guns from the hands of terrorists.

14. The DUP also said that in December, 1993, after the signing of the Downing Street Declaration, the Irish Government maintained that it was talking about a permanent cessation of violence and the handing in of weapons with the assurance that it was not just a case of seeing first what the political process offered. However, the basis of the agenda under discussion in the talks was that the IRA first wanted to see what is being offered to get their pre-determined way into the talks process.

15. The DUP went on to say that on 1 June, 1994 the Irish Government said that there would have to be a verification of handing over of arms, it had to be permanent and there had to be evidence of that fact. It was clear that the Irish Government had done a complete and total somersault on the issue.

16. The British Government took a similar position when it said in 1993 that the IRA would have to give up its guns and explosives

to prove that violence was over. Yet, the DUP said, the discussions were proceeding on the agenda to get the IRA into the talks by declaring any old cease-fire at all and giving up attacks for a while, without one gun being handed over. The DUP wished to put it directly to the British Government that the IRA would never be required to give up its weapons to prove that violence had finished.

17. The UKUP intervened to ask whether the DUP was aware that on 28 August, 1995, the NIO had said that any procedure other than handing over weapons would be inconsistent with the democratic process. The DUP acknowledged the point and said that a particular member in the Stormont Parliament kept a black book as a record of statements by politicians for the purpose of reminding people of their promises. The DUP said it wanted to remind the Governments of their pussyfooting over the issue of decommissioning. Every week that went by saw a slippage of the British Government's position in the matter. The Prime Minister had said the Government would make no concessions to Sinn Fein. The Presbyterian Church Committee had asked that the IRA hand over weapons before a cease-fire was accepted. This request fell on deaf ears. The former Taoiseach, Albert Reynolds created the conditions for the IRA to ignore the request. He said that if all weapons were handed in before a settlement was found, this would be a recipe for disaster.

18. Sinn Fein had said that when it talked to the British Government it would not discuss the question of IRA arms but the general question of overall disarmament and partition. It was encouraged in that approach by Mr Reynolds and the Irish Government to follow the IRA line. The British Government, according to the DUP, have been subjected to the same approach.

If Sinn Fein get into the talks, those are the issues that they will want to discuss. But the DUP had news for Sinn Fein. The party said there won't be a united Ireland. Even if the British Government continued to sell out the union, the people of Northern Ireland, who were without a Parliament, would be determined, no matter what happened, not to go down the road to Dublin rule. The position had deteriorated in relation to decommissioning in January, 1995 when Government papers were given to Sinn Fein as part of the then talks process with the Government which contained a commitment that decommissioning was not a pre-condition for Sinn Fein's entry to all-party talks. The milestones of the conciliation process were clearly marked. On 18 January, 1995 Sinn Fein said no to decommissioning. The DUP said that in an interview, Sinn Fein said that arms may prove to be a crucial obstacle and that the Dublin Government and the US Administration had agreed with that position. Sinn Fein had also maintained that no such pre-condition applied in the case of conflict in Zimbabwe, El Salvador, South Africa or the Middle East.

19. At this point (12.59) the Chairman adjourned the meeting to 14.30.

Independent Chairmen Notetakers
25 October 1996

OIC/PS30