

From: Independent Chairmen Notetakers  
25 July 1996

SUMMARY RECORD OF INFORMAL DISCUSSIONS ON PROCEDURAL GUIDELINES  
AND AGENDA FOR PLENARY SESSION - THURSDAY 25 JULY (10.18-10.30)

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. The Chairman convened the meeting at 10.18, thanking those for their attendance. He continued saying that, as agreed at the end of the previous evening's discussion, the topic under discussion for this session would focus on the remaining items for the Agenda for the Opening Plenary session. The Chairman referred to the fact that the two Governments had distributed a paper some 60 minutes previously but he understood that some of the participants had asked for further time to view this document in its entirety. The Chairman continued suggesting that one way of working around this difficulty would be to ask representatives from each Government to comment on the paper, then adjourn for one hour and reconvene to allow a general discussion on it to take



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place. Hearing no comments against this proposal, the Chairman invited the Minister of State to address the meeting.

2. The Minister of State began saying that the paper reflected the Government's intention to put down in writing agenda items for the remainder of the Opening Plenary as well as proposals to enable progress to be made beyond that particular meeting. He continued saying that he appreciated that some delegates might not yet have had sufficient time to study it in detail. The Minister of State indicated, however, that anyone who wished to come and speak to the British Government during the period of the adjournment regarding issues contained in the paper and the backdrop to these would be welcome. The Minister of State said he very much valued the earlier round table informal discussions which had taken place on this issue and the subsequent views of parties during the recent bilateral process. These exchanges had given rise to the view that the original agenda produced by the Governments was now unlikely to receive widespread support from the participants. This was why a revised version had now been tabled. The Minister of State said that he believed the new agenda took account of concerns expressed earlier by participants - for example, the paper did not now imply a role for the Independent Chairman on decommissioning in relation to the intentions of the parties. Therefore, in his view, it could provide a basis for general agreement and support.

3. The Minister of State continued his remarks, referring to the potential timing of the remainder of the Opening Plenary session. He said it was his belief that emphasis should be given to the process reaching agreement on this agenda and adoption of the comprehensive agenda for the negotiations before the summer break arrived. The Minister of State said that the accompanying paper



to the agenda proposals dealt with issues which in his view could be progressed and agreed on after Monday's formal Opening Plenary session. He continued, saying that one item required clarification. This related to the comprehensive agenda and the work which needed to be taken forward on this after the Opening Plenary. The Minister of State said that he would welcome views from the parties on these as they had been taken from the 1992 process. While this, he believed, was a useful starting point there was an important opportunity for participants to produce additions or amendments which then needed to be submitted by 18.00 on 29 July. The Minister of State indicated that he believed there may still be concerns about the agenda for Strand One which presently contained a specific reference to constitutional issues yet references on this issue were couched in a more general format in the agendas for other Strands. The Minister of State said that given this position, he was amenable to change through the process of submitting proposals already mentioned. In concluding his remarks the Minister of State said that the intention lying behind the paper was that important matters could be taken forward before the summer break on a constructive basis. Achieving this, he believed, would provide a signal to the public that the process was capable of making progress and could meet the concerns of the electorate in general.

4. Mr O'hUiginn said that he endorsed the Minister of State's comments. He said that he believed it was right to maintain an ambitious programme before the summer recess. In considering the paper that had now been circulated, the Irish Government had given some thought as to whether an oral or a written submission should be made on this issue. He believed, however, that it was valuable to jot down in writing the next steps as the Governments saw them as it therefore provided a focus for all the participants.



Mr O'hUiginn referred to paragraph 2 of the covering paper and in so doing said that he believed that some of the agenda items were totally uncontroversial i.e., the establishment of the Business Committee. Mr O'hUiginn acknowledged that others were perhaps somewhat more complicated but the agenda itself was straightforward enough to set up in terms of the sequence of discussions and he hoped that it wouldn't trigger a complex procedural debate. The comprehensive agenda for the negotiations might be one of those issues which would be more difficult to establish agreement on even though they had been derived from the basis of the previous talks process of 1992. He considered, from a personal point of view, that these agendas had proved reasonably serviceable and were therefore practical. He hoped therefore that the process would look upon them as an instrument to give order to the negotiations and nothing more than this.

5. Mr O'hUiginn said that to avoid any doubt the Irish Government had no difficulty with the agenda for Strand One. He continued saying that as to the aspect of addressing the Report of the International Body this was another, more complicated issue. He believed that the Report itself was a road map and a useful one as that which had already gained widespread agreement. He therefore believed that it would be possible to make progress on this issue without spending an inordinate amount of time discussing it. In summarising Mr O'hUiginn said that there was great merit in raising everyone's sights towards progress over a limited period of time. He believed that the Governments' paper did set out, in totality, a difficult but obtainable programme of work given the fact that there might well be a little extra time available in week commencing 29 July. He also believed that an ambitious programme was one which might better motivate participants as opposed to one which contained less activity and



hence less of a focus. He therefore wished to endorse the Minister of State's earlier comments in bringing forward the paper in the hope that it would send an appropriate signal to the public as well as providing a basis and a framework for work and planning to be undertaken during the summer break. Hopefully this would then allow a positive approach to be adopted at a resumption in September. In concluding his remarks, Mr O'hUiginn said that he believed the document provided a good focus for debate.

6. The Chairman thanked both Government representatives for their comments and, as previously agreed, declared the meeting adjourned for one hour at 10.30.

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