

DRAFT SUMMARY RECORD OF OPENING PLENARY SESSION - other statements,
MONDAY 4 NOVEMBER 1996 (18.22)

Those present: Chairman then asked for comments as the floor was

Independent Chairmen	Government Teams	Parties
Senator Mitchell	British Government	Alliance Party
Mr Holkeri	Irish Government	Labour
General de Chastelain	had some questions for	Northern Ireland Women's Coalition
	The DUP said that the Irish Government cont	Progressive Unionist Party
	it was fully committed to decommissioning.	Social Democratic and Labour Party
	however, which the party had about other	Ulster Democratic Party
	commitments, it asked why a piece of enabl	Ulster Democratic Unionist Party
	any further ongoing commitment being attach	United Kingdom Unionist Party
	as the Irish Government appeared willing to	Ulster Unionist Party
	realising their intentions on the issue?	
	asked for some further clarification of the DUP question. The DUP	

1. The Chairman convened the meeting at 18.22 and reminded participants that before the break, the UKUP had asked how the debate was going to proceed in this session. The Chairman then suggested that an open discussion now commence until the scheduled finishing time of 20.00. A further decision would then be taken the next morning with regard to the precise structure of the debate and whether specific time limits should be introduced to limit exchanges. The Chairman asked for comments on this.

2. The DUP asked whether an open discussion meant that parties could ask questions of others and seek responses from them. The Chairman indicated this was correct. The DUP then highlighted the fact that no British Government Minister was present. Was there going to be one present during the session? The British Government said that a Minister would be present in due course. The DUP said that it would defer its questions until such times as a Minister was present. The Chairman reiterated his view that

this session was open for participants to make further statements, raise questions, seek clarification of other parties positions and so forth. The Chairman then asked for comments as the floor was now open for discussion. As no one commenced the debate at this point, the Chairman asked for suggestions as to how to proceed.

3. The UUP said it had some questions for the Irish Government. The UUP said that the Irish Government continued to maintain that it was fully committed to decommissioning. Given past doubts, however, which the party had about other Irish Government commitments, it asked why a piece of enabling legislation, without any further ongoing commitment being attached to it, was as much as the Irish Government appeared willing to offer in terms of realising their intentions on the issue? The Irish Government asked for some further clarification of the UUP question. The UUP said that from discussions it had had with the Irish Government, it appeared that it was not prepared to go beyond progressing the enabling legislation. There were no complementary steps, the Irish Government appeared opposed to the establishment of a commission designate and to regulations being brought in after the legislation had been passed through the Dail. The UUP asked whether the Irish Government was able to offer anything further on decommissioning in the immediate future beyond the enabling legislation?

4. The Irish Government, in response, said that it was unaware of any position which had been established by it other than the absolutely clear stance it was presenting on decommissioning. There were no short comings on the Irish Government side. It was quite prepared to get in the enabling legislation and to allow the talks body to have input into the decommissioning process. The Irish Government asked for evidence which said it was not going

beyond this point? The legislation would be passed by Christmas, The Irish Government said it was also willing to agree to the appointment of experts who might be of assistance to the decommissioning sub-committee as well as forming part of the verifying commission at a later stage. It continued saying that the enabling legislation would be made available in draft to the decommissioning sub-committee for discussion. This was guaranteed. There was therefore no evidence that the Irish Government was being restrictive on any of this. The Irish Government said it was doing all it could to try and go forward on the issue. However decommissioning itself depended on progress made in the talks and to try and go forward in isolation from this only resulted in a vacuum being created which would realise nothing.

5. The UUP said it was all very well saying that no work could be achieved in a vacuum. But if the legislation could be advanced by December then, asked the UUP, what was the timescale for the appointments to the commission; the identification of experts, the setting up of such a commission; and what work would it actually handle? The UUP asked the Irish Government whether it was thought that there could be some merit in establishing a commission designate, concurrent with the legislation being taken through Parliament? Was it not a reasonable proposition to suggest that a commission designate would have a hand in bringing forward regulations, so that when the enabling legislation was brought through, these other issues could also be brought forward quickly. The UUP said it was also interested in the Irish Government's language in relation to the independent experts who "might" be of assistance. The party wondered what this statement actually meant.

6. The Irish Government, in reply, stated that the range of questions being asked by the UUP illustrated the point that there were many issues still to be discussed by the talks body. The Irish Government said that, as far as decommissioning was concerned, it was and would continue to work on the basis of the full implementation of the Mitchell Report. It said that the UUP seemed, by its questions, to be inferring that the Irish Government had some degree of exclusivity over the answers to all these points. Such an interpretation would appear to be pre-empt paragraph 40 of the Mitchell Report which stated that the commission would be appointed by the British and Irish Governments on the basis of consultation with the other parties to the negotiation process. Such pre-empting was not up for consideration. The UUP asked whether it was the case that both Governments would accept nominees from the talks body to be on the commission?

7. The Irish Government said it now seemed the UUP wanted the Irish Government to dictate on some of these issues, yet earlier it wished to reinforce the point about everyone being able to participate in the process. The Irish Government continued by saying that it hoped the commission might have experts on it from the sub-committee as it needed this sort of background. The key point here, however, was that there could be no push for this from one quarter. It was a matter for all the participants. The UUP then asked whether both Governments were now saying that the participants were unable to engage directly on issues relating to the mechanisms of decommissioning but instead such business would have to be taken through a sub-committee which as a result would require to have some technical support? Surely this was not on. The UUP said the two Governments appeared to be shirking their responsibilities on this.

8. The Irish Government said it was firm in its resolve with regard to implementing the International Body's Report. The proper climate had to be created for meaningful decommissioning. The commission would only be appointed by the Governments after discussions in the talks body. There would be no pre-empting of this issue. The Irish Government said that the principle of mutuality was envisaged in nearly every paragraph of the Mitchell Report and it would abide by this approach. The Irish Government said it had given a commitment that it would keep things moving on the decommissioning front in so far as was possible and would pass the enabling legislation before the end of the year.

9. The UUP said that it had been asking whether the two Governments had primary responsibility for putting decommissioning in place. However, what the party seemed to be hearing from the responses was only that the legislation would be put in place, to be followed by some sort of laborious process to set up a commission which would take it on from there. The UUP said the answers so far simply implied that the only people who were being considered in this issue were those who had the guns. There were, however, a great many others who required an assurance that the decommissioning issue was being taken forward as a complete package rather than one which appeared to be disjointed.

10. The Irish Government said it hadn't conveyed this view and nothing which it had said in its responses to the UUP could be construed as such. The Irish Government stated that it had no guns but it had to recognise and deal with those who did have them. Putting the legislation in place was the first step but that's all it was. The Irish Government said it had made its position clear on that matter and no one could therefore suggest

that it was not firm on decommissioning. Any other perception was wrong. The UUP said it had raised a number of questions and received a number of answers. The answers, however, had been disappointing for it appeared from these that both Governments were unable or not inclined to go away and discuss between them the technical details of decommissioning for the good of all the people in Northern Ireland.

11. The SDLP stated that after all the discussions over the last few months and the frequent statements made by the unionist parties regarding ownership of the process, the UUP now seemed to be suggesting that this aspect of decommissioning should be discussed and worked upon in isolation. The SDLP said it did not believe that the Irish Government's statement had removed the primary responsibility of the Governments in this issue. Was the UUP now suggesting that there wasn't an input for the participants in decommissioning? Furthermore was the UUP's apparent proposal not likely to leave the process with only a narrow window of opportunity through which to make an input or contribution?

12. The UUP said that it believed the talks body to be the monitors of the decommissioning process. The two Governments were the enablers in this - but the regulations and schemes would be devised from the talks body. The UUP said that unless there was a Chairman designate in place soon, there was little point in the talks body meeting in sub-committee format to talk about decommissioning, never mind the technical experts also being unavailable. The people who now needed to be interfacing with the talks body on this issue were those like the Chairman designate and possibly others. The UUP said that such interfacing was unlikely to have any great meaning in the present circumstances and it was the party's suspicion that the whole business of

decommissioning was not meant to have any great meaning in the overall scheme of things.

13. The UKUP inquired from the Chairman as to whether questions could be asked of the same participant who had earlier been questioned and whether more than one participant could be quizzed or a different series of questions could be asked of the same participant? The Chairman indicated this was the case since it was an open discussion. The UKUP stated that it had read the British Government's paper dated 30 October on decommissioning. It asked whether it could take it that the British Government's position was the same as that of the Irish Government and SDLP, that it fully endorsed the Mitchell Report in its entirety. The British Government said yes and that it had always held this view. It continued saying that it had listened to what the Irish Government had said in its replies to the UUP questions. Both Governments had been following this particular course in order to pursue decommissioning properly. This did not therefore imply that all previous work carried out on the issue suggested a lack of interest but rather that both Governments viewed it as a very serious issue. The UKUP said it didn't require this type of answer to a simple question. The British Government said it was simply taking the opportunity to add a little comment to the series of questions raised earlier by the UUP. After a further exchange between the UKUP and the British Government, the UKUP stated that there was little point in continuing with the questioning as the British Government responses rendered this process a complete waste of time. The UKUP indicated it had no further questions.

14. The UUP said it wished to address some further questions to the Irish Government. The party said that the Irish Government's

view of proceeding on decommissioning was to have the issue dealt with in a sub-committee of the plenary. The UUP view, as an alternative, was to resolve the decommissioning issue in plenary. The UUP said that decommissioning, as viewed by the Mitchell Report, was intended to be a confidence-building measure rather than a stumbling block. Putting decommissioning into a sub-committee would create a stumbling block as well as contaminate the overall process of negotiations. The UUP then asked why the Irish Government was so keen to have this issue dealt with in sub-committee as opposed to another approach?

15. The Irish Government noted that there were two approaches to this. It stated that decommissioning could only be effected by parties who had weapons and were prepared to decommission. This was the basis as set out in the Mitchell Report. The Irish Government's view (together with the British Government) was that the mechanisms for decommissioning should be dealt with in parallel to the three strands of negotiations. That was the position of the Irish Government and it recognised it as being different to that proposed by the UUP. The UUP said that surely this view confirmed that there was unlikely to be any progress in the negotiations? The key question was how did the process reach agreement on how decommissioning should be handled? The UUP said that putting it into a sub-committee, and hence a side-track, meant it was unlikely that progress could be made on the issue. Substantive negotiations, however, could well be moving forward at the same time, while decommissioning could be used as a veto. The UUP said that this was an unacceptable position. The party was only asking for agreement on the principles and mechanisms in plenary before moving these over to the commission as proposed by the UUP.

16. The Irish Government stated that it was not a question of moving decommissioning into a side-track by using the sub-committee format. The whole basis of the Mitchell Report was that both the negotiations and decommissioning would be progressed in parallel. The Irish Government asked whether the UUP's approach meant that this would result in the decommissioning of weapons? The Irish Government's proposal for a sub-committee was to ensure that the mechanisms were put in place with the sub-committee reporting back on these to the plenary. The way forward had to be viewed as both processes (decommissioning and three stranded negotiations) moving together in a forward direction thereby not leaving one or the other behind at any stage.

17. The UUP asked about the situation pertaining if the IRA declared another cease-fire. The Irish Government in reply referred to para 20(e) of the International Body's Report and said that reaching agreements on principles does not automatically lead to decommissioning. The proposition which the Irish Government supported was different to the UUP's view of handling the issue. This meant that the two participants would have to agree to disagree on this aspect. The UUP asked again about steps would decommissioning as a confidence-building measure. What would be the effect on the decommissioning debate at the talks if Sinn Fein was present? Furthermore, the UUP asked, at what point would the Irish Government actually see decommissioning taking place if this scenario occurred?

18. The Irish Government said it could not be exactly sure as to what point weapons would be handed over in this scenario. The proper climate had to be created and confidence-building measures had to be in place on both fronts (negotiations and decommissioning). The UUP asked whether the Irish Government was

now saying that the talks body could agree the principles of decommissioning and then get a sub-committee to do the rest? What technical expertise would this sub-committee have? Was this its role? The UUP then asked what period of time would have to elapse from a new IRA cease-fire being declared before Sinn Fein could enter the negotiations? Had the Irish Government considered this and what conditions would be imposed?

19. The Irish Government said there must be a credible cease-fire but it would not be drawn out on such issues as a time-table for entry into the talks. The Irish Government said it needed to be convinced about a new IRA cease-fire and read out paragraphs 8 and 9 of the Ground Rules to reinforce this point. The Irish Government said it recalled the UUP leader remarking on a past occasion that what is important is genuine commitment, not timescales. The UUP said the point at issue here was whether or not Sinn Fein/IRA was committed to exclusively peaceful means. Where was the tangible evidence for this? The UUP then asked the Irish Government by what means could it be established that it would be convinced about a new IRA cease-fire? How could the genuineness of a new IRA cease-fire be tested? What steps would the Irish Government be taking to measure this?

20. The Irish Government said it was better to deal with reality rather than hypothetical scenarios. A new cease-fire had to be called first before any further decisions on anything else could be taken by both Governments. The UUP again asked about the steps taken to measure the genuineness of a new IRA cease-fire. The Irish Government said it had already given a reply on this. An unequivocal cease-fire was required first, followed by the adoption of the principles set out in para 20 of the Mitchell Report.

21. The Irish Government referred to paragraphs 8 and 9 in the Ground Rules dealing with the question of participation in the negotiations concerning the establishment of a commitment to exclusively peaceful methods and the requirement of an unequivocal restoration of the cease-fire of August, 1994.

22. The UUP asked whether a mere restatement of the terms of the earlier cease-fire would allow Sinn Fein into the talks. The Irish Government said that only until a cease-fire was declared would its precise terms be known. The Government would then make its evaluation at that point. It had to be remembered, nevertheless, that lives were saved as a result of the cease-fire of August 1994. No one anticipated its breakdown and it had become accepted as permanent by most people.

23. The UUP wondered what criteria would be used by the Irish Government to measure the credibility a new cease-fire. It would seem that a restatement of the 1994 cease-fire would suffice for the Irish Government, even though it did not meet the requirement of a commitment to exclusively peaceful means. It was clear that the IRA were not so committed the first time around. So what other measures, indicators or tests would be set by the Irish Government to ensure that a new cease-fire was more than just a temporary cessation of violence and that the IRA was committed as required by paragraph 8 of the Ground Rules? The Irish Government said that it now seemed that the meeting was discussing issues broader than decommissioning. The position was, however, that both Governments would make a political judgement at the time a cease-fire was declared. They would require to be satisfied at that time from its terms that it was unequivocal and Sinn Fein would also have to subscribe to the 6 Mitchell Principles.

that it could become a political football

24. The UUP wondered, taking into account the Irish Government's recent and new found aversion to the 2 Governments making decisions in secret, whether it was the intention of the Irish Government to encourage the British Government to refer the matter for the consideration of the parties in the plenary session so that they could decide on the question of whether Sinn Fein/IRA should be admitted to the negotiating process? The Irish Government said that the matter of entry into the negotiations was solely the decision of the British Government under the terms of the 1996 Entry to Negotiations Act.

25. The UUP then asked the Irish Government with regard to the question of legislation, whether it saw a linkage between its passage through Parliament and progress being made in the talks. Was the Government committed to processing the legislation regardless of progress in the talks? The Irish Government said that this was essentially a matter for parliament itself. The Bill would in all probability go into a special committee and it was not unreasonable to assume that information in relation to the talks process would feed into the system. The UUP wished to know the timescale involved for passage of the Bill into law to which the Irish Government said that, as the Taoiseach had already indicated, it would be in as short a space of time as possible.

26. The UUP said that the Irish Government had sought to assure them that it would pass the legislation through the Dail and it was also the case that the form of the legislation could not be guaranteed. Nevertheless, the UUP was expected to take part in a sub-committee on decommissioning with no actual guarantee of progress in that body, while at the same time being involved in substantive negotiations in the strands. It seemed to be the case

that progress on decommissioning could become a political football which would be at the mercy of and dependent on progress in those negotiations. In effect, it would become a stumbling block and not a confidence building measure at all. The Government was not in a position to guarantee that the legislation would be enacted before January, 1997.

27. The Irish Government said it could only guarantee to process the legislation as it had promised. The draft Bill had been produced for scrutiny by the UUP to show that the drafting work (which the Government had been accused by the party of not having done) was completed. The UUP wondered what would be the reaction of Irish TDs to NI politicians having a drafting role in the matter of the legislation. The Irish Government said that the Irish people and the parliament had demonstrated their serious attitude on the issue and the need for a cease-fire. They marched in thousands in support of this objective. Both Governments wanted to be as helpful as possible in the matter and were prepared to place the respective Bills on decommissioning before the proposed sub-committee of the talks body. The draft legislation in both jurisdictions was in enabling form to allow the precise details to be worked out in the associated regulations or secondary instruments. Yet, the Irish Government said, both Governments were heavily criticised because of their desire to have an input from the parties into the process. It seemed to be the case, however, that because of the intended timescale in relation to the processing of the legislation and possible delays in establishing the sub-committee, that that consultation process might not happen. It was possible, nevertheless, the Irish Government said for the UUP to suggest amendments but, even though it had seen the draft Bill, no proposals had been received from the UUP in the matter so far.

28. The UUP said it was possible to avoid such delays by dealing with the relevant issues in the Plenary session. Why did the matter have to go into a sub-committee? There was no benefit in that approach and it would clearly delay progress on the decommissioning issue. The Irish Government took a different view and said that the delay would occur if the establishment of the sub-committee were held up. If the sub-committee were set up tomorrow, it could start working straight away. The UUP said why not do the work in the plenary group? The Irish Government responded by saying that the sub-committee would deal with wider issues of decommissioning. The legislation was only one part of that. A whole sequential series of steps would still require to be taken before getting into the areas desired by the UUP.

29. The UUP said that the answers by the Irish Government showed a fundamental difference between it and the pro-union parties as to how the issue of decommissioning in terms of the whole process should be handled. The creation of the fourth strand illustrated a desire not to treat decommissioning as an urgent matter. Unionists took the view that it was urgent. It has dogged the discussions since 1994. If decommissioning was pushed into a fourth strand it would return again and again to haunt the process. The sooner it was dealt with, the better. The proposals by the Irish Government, the UUP said, meant that decommissioning was a millstone. It was clear, however, the UUP said, that it would not convince the Irish Government of this and that it likewise would not bring the UUP around to the view that the proposed sub-committee was the way to deal with the issue. The Irish Government said that decommissioning was something that was desired by all the parties and that it would happen parallel to

political progress. That was the position adopted in the Mitchell Report and that was the basis for the structures proposed.

30. The DUP requested the Government to state what they saw as the primary reason for decommissioning. The British Government said that in a democracy, politics and the threat of violence did not mix. The DUP said that that should be the case. But the British Government had specifically indicated that it supported the Mitchell Report which gave other reasons as to why the decommissioning should take place, for example, as a confidence building measure. With regard to the question of timing, the DUP asked why decommissioning should not take place sooner rather than later. The British Government said it wanted decommissioning to take place straight away. So did the Mitchell Report but it acknowledged that it would not happen that way. In a democracy it was undesirable that people would have to sit down and discuss their future with those who used violence for political purposes. And, for so long as weapons were retained, there was an implicit threat that if a satisfactory outcome to the negotiating process was not agreed, those arms would be used. That was also recognised in the Mitchell Report. But there came a point, the British Government said, where there had to be a choice between what was realistic and what was not. This was the compromise approach suggested by the Mitchell Report and followed by the two Governments.

31. The DUP asked that if there was an implicit threat from a group with weaponry behind it, would the Government have to be satisfied as one of the conditions that such a threat no longer existed? The British Government said that such a party would have to have declared a cease-fire and a test of realism would also have to be applied. The Mitchell Report addressed that matter by

adopting the compromise approach of tranches of weapons being handed over at different stages in the process. The British Government said it wanted all illegally-held arms decommissioned including those held by the loyalist paramilitaries. The DUP said that its question did not apply to the latter groups because their cease-fire was of longer duration than that of the IRA. If the talks were to be meaningful, it was necessary to have a level playing field for the participants. Sinn Fein could enter the negotiations on the basis of a tactical cease-fire and the implicit threat would be present that they could use their weapons to get their way in the negotiations.

32. The British Government responded by saying that with each new atrocity, the credibility burden became heavier. The Secretary of State has the responsibility to consider whether the criteria laid down in paragraphs 8 and 9 of the Ground Rules were fulfilled. The relevant nominations could be sought from Sinn Fein once they abided by the Mitchell Report and all the circumstances would have to be taken into account. The DUP asked if Sinn Fein were required to sign up to the Mitchell Report and a programme of decommissioning, would such a course be inconsistent with the role of the Secretary of State under the Entry to Negotiations Act, 1996?

33. The British Government said that, were the Secretary of State now to state definitive criteria, he might well be found by a court to have fettered his discretion in such circumstances and any decision would be overturned. He had to be careful in approaching his answer to the question for that very reason. The DUP said that its question was whether it was inconsistent with the legislation for the Secretary of State at the stage of considering inviting nominations, to indicate that certain

conditions should be met, such as a programme of decommissioning. The Secretary of State replied to the effect that if that were reasonable it might not be considered inconsistent, but again, he had to be careful not to commit himself at that point as to what might be considered reasonable or unreasonable or consistent or inconsistent. The DUP then addressed its remarks to the Irish Government and said that it had said that any cease-fire should be credible. Did the Minister for Justice agree with the remarks of the Taoiseach that it had to be credible and irrevocable? The Minister replied affirmatively.

34. The DUP said that that went beyond what the British Government indicated. With regard to the process of actual decommissioning, both Governments in endorsing the Mitchell Report agreed to a process whereby guns would be handed over while talks were proceeding in the three strands. The party wondered how the Governments could assure the parties that this meant not just parallel talking but parallel decommissioning also. The British Government said that talking was a start.

35. The DUP said that if a committee was to be established the party would be asked to take it as a matter of faith that there would be no blocking on the decommissioning issue bearing in mind that the Irish Government, the British Government and the SDLP would be on the committee. To alleviate any fears in that regard would it be possible to separate the work of the committee into different areas and have it deal with the more mechanical aspects of decommissioning while the issue of agreement on timescales could be done in the plenary group?

36. The British Government said that it agreed with the Irish Government with regard to the need to press on with the necessary

preliminary work before the verification commission was created. It wanted to get on with this aspect of the matter as quickly as possible. It had tried to deal with unionist anxieties on the issue. The reality was that while there was a fear the Sinn Fein could try to block progress in the decommissioning sub-committee, they could also try to do the same in the plenary group. The DUP said the difference was that if the matter was being discussed in plenary, no parallel negotiations would be taking place. The British Government asked was it being suggested that the committee could block progress while the talks process was continuing? If that was the case, the participants would have a remedy to deal with the situation. The SDLP took up that point and said that the remedy lay in the cross-referencing process as between the strands and the committee. It was also the case, the party said, that the same capacity for blockage arose in all the strands.

37. The Irish Government said it agreed with the British Government. It saw the whole process as a mutually reinforcing one and the same people would be involved in all the discussions. The DUP said that there seemed to be a lack of understanding as to what unionists were prepared to do in the talks process. The process required constitutional political parties to sit down with ex-paramilitaries who had to prove themselves as democrats. A key part of that process in its most tangible form was that such parties were actually prepared to set aside their weapons as a confidence-building measure to illustrate their serious intent. All unionist parties had indicated that they would not go beyond the preliminary stage on the talks until decommissioning had begun, but now the parties were being enticed to go into substantial talks on the basis of assessing in a sub-committee whether decommissioning would take place. That situation went beyond the mandate given to the DUP, the party said.

38. With regard to the issue of timing, the DUP wondered whether the Governments had given any consideration as to how they related the incremental stages of the decommissioning process to progress in the talks. It wondered what the staging points were along the road and sought information on the Governments' broad thinking in the matter.

39. The British Government said it had considerable sympathy with the view of the DUP that all arms should be decommissioned. The Mitchell Report recognised that as a reasonable proposition too. But it was clear that it would not happen that way so the British Government moved to the Washington 3 test (prior decommissioning). Then the invitation was issued to the International Body to examine the matter. The British Government was heavily criticised over its movement in the matter on the basis that it got nothing in return, but it felt that it was realistic to behave as it did. It would not have accepted the Mitchell Report if it was not realistic to do so. It accepted and relied upon the Mitchell Report that decommissioning was necessary to build up confidence with the handing over of modest tranches of weapons on an incremental basis during talks. It could not answer precisely as to how that incremental process was to be related with the talks, but the object was to build up confidence piece by piece. The sub-committee would address itself to that question, but there would have to be an incremental process and its implementation would have the effect of building up confidence.

40. The Irish Government said it was in agreement with that view and added that it did not believe that the Governments could predict in the prescriptive way sought by the DUP. It referred to the experience gained in the earlier stages of the talks in

getting agreement on the agenda for the remainder of the opening plenary session and the rules of procedure. The art of politics it felt was to make the necessary judgements as the process moved forward. It was not possible to give exact dates or times and it referred to the provisions of paragraph 26 in the Mitchell Report dealing with the assessment of the commitment to decommissioning and the realities of the situation.

41. The UUP asked the Irish Government whether it believed that threats of violence and murder inhibited political relationships. The Irish Government replied affirmatively. The UUP then asked whether it was the case that guns were to be traded for political concessions. The Irish Government replied that it favoured the Mitchell Report in the matter and that it was not possible to pick and choose. The next question from the UUP was whether the Irish Government would endorse or repudiate someone who said that the climate dictated that political progress could take place. The Irish Government referred to paragraphs 34/35 in the Mitchell Report in that regard. The UUP then said that it interpreted that answer to mean that the Irish Government endorsed the notion of trading guns for political progress. The Irish Government replied that that was not what the Mitchell Report said in the matter.

42. The Chairman adjourned the meeting at 20.08 until 10.00 the following morning.

Independent Chairmen Notetakers
8 November 1996

OIC/PS42