

**DRAFT SUMMARY RECORD OF OPENING PLENARY SESSION -
WEDNESDAY 6 NOVEMBER 1996 (13.45)**

Those present:

Independent Chairmen	Government Teams	Parties
Senator Mitchell	British Government	Alliance Party
Mr Holkeri	Irish Government	Labour
General de Chastelain		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 brought the session to order at 13.50 and invited the DUP to continue its questioning. The DUP said that participants were dealing with the issues of political progress and the timing of decommissioning, and that the Irish Government had not yet envisaged when decommissioning should occur. The DUP drew the attention of the Irish Government to paragraph 34 of the Mitchell Report which referred to decommissioning occurring during the political process. The word "during" was open to interpretation, but one interpretation was that weapons could be decommissioned at the start of the political process. The Irish Government said that a reading of paragraphs 26 and 34 suggested that decommissioning should occur after the commencement of the political process. The DUP interpretation that decommissioning could occur at the beginning of the talks process was valid, but, the reality of the situation had to be considered, and other parts of the Report had to be consulted, for example, paragraphs 35 and 50.

2. The DUP said that it was only trying to establish that decommissioning could occur, for example, on the first day of the political process and that the proposal by the Governments to set up a sub-committee on decommissioning would effectively rule this option out. The Irish Government said that neither the DUP nor itself had any weapons which needed to be decommissioned. The IRA did hold such weapons. Realistically speaking, Sinn Fein had to be present at the talks for the objective of decommissioning to be achieved. There had to be a commitment on the part of those who actually held the weapons. The rational interpretation of paragraph 34 was that decommissioning was linked with the presence at the talks of those who would be required to deliver on decommissioning. The DUP said that the sole concern of the Irish Government on the decommissioning issue was to get terrorist weapons out of circulation. The unionist position was somewhat different. In addition to the removal of these weapons there was the need for a level playing field during the political negotiations. Terrorist weapons represented threat to the democratic parties. Were the participants not in a position to require the terrorists to hand over their guns before they were admitted to the talks?

3. The Irish Government said that however desirable this might be for all of the democratic participants, it was simply not a reality. The International Body had been asked to advise on the question. The DUP said that the Irish Government had a blind spot. The issue was whether or not the participants should allow the terrorists to dictate to the democratic participants. This was a matter of principle whereas the International Body had opted for pragmatism. Instead of requiring the terrorists to rise up to

democratic principles, the participants would be sinking to their level. The Irish Government said that the democratic participants were in effect seeking to dictate the terms of Sinn Fein's entry to the talks.

4. The DUP said that it was agreed what was meant by the term "during the process". It was for the participants to determine when decommissioning should occur. By not insisting upon immediate decommissioning one of the possibilities under paragraph 34 of the Report was being excluded. The unionist participants were being asked to participate in a process where there were no clear staging points and in which the Irish Government and the SDLP enjoyed a power of veto. Unionists, under the proposal of the two Governments, would be sucked into a process which could lead to their judgement being ruled faulty by the unionist community, just as the judgement of the Governments had been faulty in the matter of the 1994 cease-fire. The Irish Government said that the term "veto" was unhelpful. The rules provided for sufficient consensus. The reality was that in order to achieve decommissioning the parties should follow the advice of the International Body. The sequencing, timing and other details of the decommissioning process would have to be determined by the participants. The DUP said that the Irish Government was asking unionists to take a leap of faith. Where was the commitment to actual decommissioning? Unionists were being invited to walk down a path along which at some point agreement might or might not be reached to decommission terrorist weapons.

5. The Irish Government said that one of the Mitchell Principles was total decommissioning. Progress on political issues had to be accompanied by progress on decommissioning. The proposal was to

get Sinn Fein to the talks on the basis of a cease-fire and under the constraints supplied by the rules. There had been no political process nor rules in existence in 1994. The situation was now more favourable. The DUP said that it had been established where the distinction lies. On the one hand the Irish Government wanted Sinn Fein to participate in the talks process in order to persuade the IRA to surrender weapons. The DUP position on the other hand was that participants should be laying down the requirements for Sinn Fein's participation in the talks. The DUP asked the Irish Government to confirm its reported public statement that an IRA cease-fire must be credible and irrevocable, that there should be a renunciation of violence, and that more than soft words were required, and the further reported public statement that there must be evidence of commitment, with no going back to violence or threat of violence. The Irish Government confirmed these statements.

6. The DUP asked if the Irish Government intended to accept an IRA cease-fire solely on the basis of the language used. The Irish Government said that it intended to consider such an announcement by the IRA most seriously. The DUP asked if the term "evidence" did not really imply validation measures beyond the wording employed by the IRA, which would inform the Irish Government's judgement. The Irish Government said that its judgement would be guided by the Mitchell Principles. The DUP said that those were factors. The other requirement was for a cessation of violence and pointed out that the latter of the aforementioned public statements appeared to focus upon not whether the cease-fire statement was credible but whether or not the cease-fire itself was credible.

7. The Irish Government said that the acceptance of the Mitchell Principles was decisive and that surely the most important thing

was to get Sinn Fein to subscribe to those principles. The DUP said that the judgement of any announcement by Sinn Fein/IRA in the light of past behaviour had to rest on evidence of their behaviour rather than upon their words. The Irish Government said that judgement would be made when a cease-fire was announced.

8. At this stage the SDLP, with the DUP's agreement, intervened to say that the DUP had earlier asked the Irish Government to put itself in the shoes of unionists and asked the DUP to accept that many non-unionists shared the unionists' scepticism of Sinn Fein/IRA intentions. However a leap of faith by all of the participants was necessary. The DUP said that they might well have been induced to take a leap of faith before the events of recent months, but that a leap of faith now seemed more like a leap of folly in the light of recent experience, and asked the Irish Government if the evidence referred to in its public statements could be assumed to go beyond the mere wording of a statement.

9. The Irish Government again referred to the Mitchell Report and the Governments' paper. It believed that commitment to the Mitchell Principles would tie Sinn Fein into the process and within that process the other participants could question Sinn Fein on its commitment to the Principles. The DUP asked the Irish Government to look at the Ground Rules document and indicate under which rules Sinn Fein had shown that they had abided by the democratic process. The Irish Government said that, skilful as the questioners were, the Irish Government would not be induced to go beyond the bounds of reality by providing a prescriptive list in advance of any further cease-fire. If a cease-fire was announced it would be judged on the basis of all of the factors which were material to such a judgement. The continuation of the loyalist cease-fire was

very important. It was up to Sinn Fein to commit themselves in the manner previously stated.

10. The DUP said that the Irish Government seemed to believe, wrongly, that the DUP had failed to extract an answer to its questions. The refusal to answer questions would lead the party to draw conclusions. The DUP asked the further question as to how long the Irish Government would take to make its decision in relation to a cease-fire announcement. The Irish Government said it agreed with the UUP leader's position in that what was important was a genuine commitment to peace and the democratic process; not the particular timing. In response to a DUP question as to whether it now agreed with the Tanaiste's reported view that a decision on an IRA cease-fire announcement could be made in "a matter of weeks" the Irish Government said that the evaluation might not take long; it could be a matter of weeks. The DUP expressed surprise at what it perceived as an apparent difference from the Tanaiste's statement and said that the Irish Government didn't seem to have either a view on its requirements for an acceptable cease-fire or how long it would take to reach a conclusion on such a cease-fire. The Irish Government rejected the implied difference in the views of its ministers. The DUP said it had no further questions as the Irish Government had no answers.

11. The Chairman, in inviting the UKUP to put questions, drew attention to the request by the Irish Government minister to leave at 16.00. This was noted by the participants.

12. The UKUP confirmed from the Irish Government that it had set no criteria for consideration of a possible further IRA cease-fire,

and said that in August 1994 there were such criteria, asking the Irish Government to confirm that that was so. It was the understanding of the Irish Government representative, who was not then a minister, that the judgement had been made on the terms announced by the IRA. The UKUP said that senior Irish Government ministers had accepted the cease-fire on the basis that it was permanent and that permanency was therefore a criterion used then. The UKUP asked if the British and Irish Governments had accepted the criterion that the 1994 cease-fire be permanent. The Irish Government affirmed that this was so.

13. The UKUP asked if the two Governments, prior to the announcement of the 1994 cease-fire, were in a position to determine criteria for the acceptance of a cease-fire and if so whether one such criterion was that the cease-fire should be permanent. The Irish Government responded that both Governments were satisfied that they should accept the cease-fire as lasting and permanent. The UKUP said that its reason for putting this question was that the Governments were able then to set advance criteria for the consideration of a cease-fire but that the Irish Government now found itself unable to do so. The British Government said that there was no difference between what the two Governments had considered to matter in 1994 and today. Both were looking for a real and not a tactical cease-fire. There could be no guarantee about intentions. The Governments had to consider how best to discern those intentions. In 1994 the Governments had agreed to make a working assumption about the permanence of the ceasefire.

14. The UKUP said that it was grateful that the criterion in 1994 was permanence as it is now, and asked why the Governments were

presently avoiding asking for a cease-fire to be defined by the word "permanent". The British Government said that the Governments intended the declaration to signify permanence. If for some constitutional reason the IRA felt unable to use the word "permanent", an alternative wording might be accepted on the basis that anything less than an intention of permanence would be insufficient. The UKUP quoted from a Dail Eireann debate on 15 December 1993 when Mr Spring had described a permanent cessation of violence as involving the handing over of arms, and asked if that was the present Irish Government position. The Irish Government said that it wished to see the decommissioning of all weapons but that this could not, for the reasons already stated, be made a precondition.

15. The UKUP said that that did not answer the question and asked if the Irish Government's position today was the same as Mr Spring's stated position in 1993. The Irish Government said that it was important to put the Tanaiste's comments in context. The UKUP said that it wished to acquaint the Irish Government with the realities of the situation. The British Prime Minister had stated that there could be no all-party talks without the presence of all parties. Every effort was being made to bring Sinn Fein into the talks at all costs and the Governments were going to be faced with a withdrawal from the talks by the pro-union parties. The UKUP asked if the Irish Government accepted that as a reality. The Irish Government said that it would regret that. It had been developing an understanding of the unionist position over the past months. The Irish Government said that it would like to ask the UKUP whether it considered that Sinn Fein should be excluded from the talks, irrespective of the actions of Sinn Fein/IRA, with regard to a possible renewal of the cease-fire.

16. The UKUP stated that it could assure the Irish Government that the bringing of Sinn Fein into the talks would result in the failure of the talks, because the proposal was based upon a totally flawed premise, namely that the men with weapons would come into the talks, become democrats, and hand over their weapons. Sinn Fein had already stated that they were not going to decommission their armaments before, during or after the talks process. There appeared to be no bottom line to Sinn Fein's proposed entry to the talks. The Irish Government was wrong to believe that unionists would go along with the proposal. It was outrageously wrong to believe that Sinn Fein could be controlled if only they could be got into the talks. Sinn Fein, over some 27 years, had never shown any regard for the feeling of others. They had always operated within terms of their own choosing. They were manifestly not democratic lambs, but, rather, violent animals. They were believed by Senator Mitchell and his colleagues on the International Body, even while the IRA was planning further atrocities. The reality was that the present proceedings were a peace conference and the two Governments were seeking to achieve, with Sinn Fein, the lowest price for peace.

17. The Irish Government said that all want to live in peace. It had no difficulty in accepting the UKUP's intensity of feeling on this issue. However, the Irish Government believed that the UKUP was absolutely wrong to suppose that Sinn Fein would be allowed to enter these talks on their terms. The UKUP interpretation was wrong; it was a bit disingenuous. The constraints upon Sinn Fein's possible participation in the talks were real enough. The UKUP was requested not to misunderstand or misinterpret the Irish Government's position.

18. The UKUP said that there was an essential difference between those presently around the table and Sinn Fein. Those present were restrained by democratic principles. Sinn Fein on the other hand had made absolutely no concession to democratic principles. When the 1994 cease-fire took place the Canary Wharf outrage was being planned, and the Manchester and Lisburn outrages occurred during these talks. Over the years the IRA has been fed a diet of concessions by the two Governments, based upon their analysis that if they continue to bomb, concessions would follow. Even in the face of Canary Wharf and subsequent violence both Governments continue to fail to face up to the reality of the situation. Sinn Fein simply had no intention of compromising. Before, during and after negotiations they would remain undemocratic and violent unless there is an agreement which met their objectives.

19. The Irish Government said that Sinn Fein had, with other parties, taken part in the electoral process. If the IRA cease-fire had held, they would now be present at these talks. If a further cease-fire, of the nature already discussed, were to ensue, and if Sinn Fein committed itself to the Mitchell Principles, it would not be unreasonable for them to be present at the talks. The UKUP argument implied that in such circumstances they would be present under a different mantle than other participants. The reality is that they cannot get to this table easily and if they do they can be challenged by any of the other participants. Admittedly the weapons will be there, but cannot be part of the political process.

20. The UKUP said that if that were true there would be a chorus of "hallelujahs". There would in fact be no difficulty in Sinn Fein signing up to the Mitchell Principles. They would argue that they have no weapons to decommission, their only role vis a vis the IRA, they would say, is one of advice and mediation. Their position would become analogous to that of the PUP and the UDP and the British Government would treat a challenge to Sinn Fein by other participants in a similar way to the challenges to the PUP and the UDP. If Sinn Fein gave the same responses to the five questions posed by the British Government to the PUP and UDP, they would remain at the table. It was simply a myth to suggest that Sinn Fein's presence would control the actions of the IRA. The Irish Government was seeking to use the word "unequivocal" to define the nature of the restoration of the cease-fire and not the cease-fire itself. It had accepted that the phrase "unequivocal cease-fire" was a slip of the tongue. Did the Irish Government accept that the 1994 cease-fire did not meet the criteria set?

21. The Irish Government said that the UKUP appeared to be suggesting that the calling of a cease-fire should be a matter of indifference to the Governments, that Sinn Fein should not be admitted to these talks under any circumstances. The UKUP asked whether the Irish Government was soliciting the same sort of cease-fire as occurred in 1994. At this point several of the participants began addressing questions to the Irish Government at the same time and the Chairman intervened to say that the Irish Minister had been answering questions for a long time and that there was a considerable amount of repetition in the questioning. He said that the British and Irish Governments had declared the nature of the cease-fire favourable to them as being "irrevocable", "permanent" etc. on numerous occasions.

22. The UKUP said to the Chairman that Governments were avoiding answering the question. The party was not questioning their intent but was challenging their unwillingness to put it in plain language. The Chairman said that the same basic questions had been asked repeatedly. It was up to participants to choose how they answered specific questions. It was up to those receiving their answers either to accept those answers or to draw their own conclusions from the answers given. The UUP said that some of the participants could not understand how the word "permanence" could be assessed unless qualified, for example, by stipulating a period of time such as a "matter of weeks" as stated by Mr Spring. The Chairman said that he appreciated that, but having put essentially the same question a number of times and receiving a similar number of answers the questioners had either to accept the answer or draw their own conclusions on the basis of the response they had been given.

23. The DUP said the British Government had made a strange statement, namely that "for constitutional reasons" the IRA had difficulty with the use of the word "permanent". If that was the sort of answer to be expected from Governments, participants had every right to probe their meaning. The Chairman said that the Chair was not seeking to sell anybody anything, but the question as to the Governments' meaning of "permanent" had been asked so often that further questioning was unlikely to produce the answer being sought by the questioners.

24. The UKUP said that it would recognise that the time had come to accept that adequate response on the issue would not be

forthcoming. Given that an object of the discussions was to build trust and confidence the UKUP considered that none of the explanations offered today had assisted that process. The UKUP apologised to the Chairman for what appeared to him to be undue persistence on a particular line. The questions had been asked and not answered. Addressing the Irish Government, the UKUP asked if Sinn Fein was in a category of having to establish a commitment to peace and whether a cease-fire was part of that commitment. The Irish Government responded in the affirmative. The UKUP then asked if in the expression "shown a commitment to peace" the word "shown" was expressly intended in the past tense. The Irish Government said that if the Mitchell Principles were accepted by Sinn Fein they could be said to have "shown" a commitment.

25. The UKUP asked if the Irish Government agreed that Sinn Fein and the IRA were "two sides of the same coin". The Irish Government said that it accepted an implicit relationship between Sinn Fein and the IRA but believed that there were people in Sinn Fein who were trying to achieve a cease-fire. The UKUP asked whether it was believed that Sinn Fein could accept the Mitchell Principles. The Irish Government said that Sinn Fein could only enter the talks on the basis of a cease-fire and the acceptance of the six Mitchell Principles.

26. The UKUP said that Sinn Fein had stated that they had no influence over the IRA. Sinn Fein on that basis could sign up to the Mitchell Principles. Could Sinn Fein then come into these talks? The Irish Government said that it could only reiterate what had already been said on this point. The UKUP said that its question was based upon public statements by Sinn Fein. There was a precedent, already discussed, whereby questions could be put to

Sinn Fein and answered in the same way whilst the IRA maintained its capacity for depredations. It was perfectly feasible for Sinn Fein to establish a dichotomy between itself and the IRA.

27. The Irish Government said that it took some positive measure from the fact that Sinn Fein wanted to participate in the talks. If Sinn Fein were to come into the talks and a challenge was subsequently made, if that challenge were overturned then Sinn Fein would remain at the talks. The UKUP referred to the earlier expressed belief of the Irish Government that lives had been saved as a result of the 1994 cease-fire. There was no moral validity in that view; for example, Poles who had resisted Nazi aggression had suffered much heavier casualties than the Czechs who had not. Was the Polish behaviour less moral than that of the Czechs? The UKUP believed that decisions made by the two Governments in relation to their dealings with Sinn Fein/IRA were morally flawed.

28. The UKUP, addressing the Chairman and referring to the British Government replies yesterday, said that the Chairmen had not long been involved in the talks before they had discovered a great lack of confidence and trust on the part of unionists towards the British Government. This was to be contrasted with the harmony which existed between the SDLP and the Irish Government. Over a period of some 20 years unionists had come to realise that they could not depend on the British Government. The SDLP receives information from the Irish Government. At no time over the past 20 years had the British Government supplied any assistance to the unionist parties, and successive British Governments had betrayed the trust put in them by unionists. It was now clear why the British Prime Minister was unable to say that the British Government was looking for a "permanent" cease-fire by the IRA. It

was because the British Government had been informed that the constitution of the IRA did not permit the IRA to use the term "permanent cease-fire". It was nearer the truth that the IRA constitution did not permit the handing in of its weapons, any sort of guarantee to a British Government, or the ending of its armed struggle. The Prime Minister ought to have become aware of the IRA position from Mr Martin McGuinness's reference to not surrendering weapons "now, during or later" and Mr Gerry Adams' reminder that "they haven't gone away". Time and again unionists had made it clear that they didn't wish to participate in talks with Sinn Fein in advance of disbandment of the IRA.

29. The British Government was asked to explain its reference to constitutional difficulties for the IRA and say what faith the unionist community could have in a form of words designed not to embarrass the IRA. The British Government was also asked to provide an assessment of the future of these talks if Sinn Fein were admitted without the prior handing in of guns and Semtex by the IRA.

30. The British Government said that on the constitutional reference some explanation had been advanced that the word "permanent" could not be used by the IRA and that another way had to be found to satisfy the Government. The essential point was that unless the Government was so satisfied, the statutory requirement for Sinn Fein's admission to the talks could not be met. Were the unionists now going to demand the prior decommissioning of arms and Semtex? The British Government position was firmly in accord with the advice of the International Body. The UKUP appeared to have moved away from its previous position on decommissioning.

31. The UKUP asked the British Government if it was prepared for the reality, now made abundantly clear, that the pro-union parties would not participate in talks with Sinn Fein without prior decommissioning. The British Government said that it didn't accept the Sinn Fein constitutional reservations. It was up to Sinn Fein to satisfy the British Government as to its good intentions. In the matter of decommissioning the British Government was committed to a process of decommissioning during and not prior to talks. The Government understands that at least one unionist party subscribes to paragraphs 34 and 35 of the Report of the International Body. The British Government said that it had noted carefully a strong view on the part of the unionist participants that words from Sinn Fein were not enough.

32. The DUP said that the British Government had consistently failed to tackle the bloodthirsty murderers of the IRA and said that it was totally disgraceful that the Government was striving to accommodate the people who had committed outrages which had revolted every decent person. The constitution of the IRA in these circumstances was totally irrelevant. The DUP has made no changes in its position on decommissioning. The British Government should state to the IRA what it required of them.

33. The British Government stressed that it was not engaged in some trivial dispute about words as if it was of no consequence what the IRA was doing. Sinn Fein, if it wished to participate in the talks, was required to demonstrate commitment to a peaceful resolution of the conflict. As to how they were to demonstrate that commitment, it was not a matter for stipulation by the British

Government, but the Government would make a judgement on that commitment. The Government was only too aware of the bloodthirsty behaviour of the IRA and recent outrages had made it more difficult for Sinn Fein to persuade the Government of any good intent on its part. One view was that it would be an impossible task for Sinn Fein. On the other hand, if it was not regarded as impossible for Sinn Fein to persuade the Government, then the matter became one for judgement. The British Government saw no alternative but to approach the matter in a way that was both rational and realistic. Paragraphs 8 and 9 of the Command Paper state that the Government determine the issue of Sinn Fein's participation in the talks on the basis of a judgement which cannot in law be fettered in advance. The Government could not simply disregard those people who voted for Sinn Fein.

34. The DUP said that Sinn Fein/IRA had excluded themselves from the talks by their actions. The graveyards of Ulster were full of IRA victims and the British Government had only to visit those graveyards in order to appreciate the nature of Sinn Fein/IRA. It was outrageous for the British Government to seek an accommodation with those people and absolutely obnoxious to talk in terms of the constitutional needs of the IRA. The whole matter was a charade. The British Government asked if the DUP considered that there were no circumstances in which Sinn Fein might be admitted to the talks process. The DUP responded that the British Government, and not the DUP, was responsible for setting conditions for Sinn Fein's entry to the talks. The DUP position was that the IRA should be abolished. The references to the constitution of the IRA were totally unacceptable.

35. The British Government said that the DUP did seem to envisage the possibility of Sinn Fein taking part in the talks. The DUP said that it was ashamed of the British Government and its attitude towards terrorism, and repeated that the reference to the constitutional needs of the IRA was absolutely disgraceful.

36. The UUP said that the Irish Government had said that the IRA would have shown that they had abided by the democratic process by accepting the Mitchell Principles. The Chairman (the Irish Government Minister had departed by this stage following notification) said that the Irish Government had also stipulated an IRA cease-fire. The UUP said that it took that as fundamental, and went on to say that the word "abide" implied a continuation of behaviour which in turn suggested the passage of time. The act of acceptance of the Principles appeared in itself to be insufficient. The British Government responded that it needed to be remembered that Sinn Fein would in the first place have to be invited in order to have the opportunity of accepting the Mitchell Principles.

37. The UUP said that the Irish Government had left the impression that the Mitchell Principles were sufficient, given of course, the cease-fire declaration. A passage of time seemed appropriate as a test of Sinn Fein's sincerity, particularly in the light of experience of the 1994 cease-fire. The British Government reiterated that before Sinn Fein could be admitted to the talks they had to be invited, and by law this was a matter for the British Government. The issue became one of assessing the circumstances surrounding any ceasefire announcement as well as the wording of such an announcement.

38. The UKUP, with the agreement of the UUP to give way, said that the British Government appeared to be implying that the actual signing of the Mitchell Principles by Sinn Fein would not precede an invitation to attend the talks. The UUP said that the signing of the Principles would be the final act of a process. The UKUP requested and was granted approval by the Chairman to address the UUP. The UKUP asked if it was the position of the UUP that the IRA should be required to announce a complete, permanent and universal cease-fire and that Sinn Fein would not be admitted to the talks until they had shown good faith.

39. The UUP said that it had circulated a document three weeks ago setting out its position. The whole purpose of the UUP's objection to a sub-committee on decommissioning was that in its judgement such a committee would be incapable of reaching a conclusion. The entry of Sinn Fein to the talks should be preceded by the cease-fire followed by an appropriate passage of time to indicate permanence. The UUP was only interested in a permanent cease-fire and the permanence could only be proved by passage of time. The UKUP said that words must be followed by acts and that there had to be a handing over of weapons by the IRA. The UUP said that its position had been set out explicitly in its document on decommissioning.

40. The British Government said that it would like to address a question to the Alliance Party. The British Government said that unionists had conveyed a very clear expression of anxiety that Sinn Fein could block progress on decommissioning if they were admitted to the talks and that the Alliance Party's document contained an alternative proposal. Elaboration of it was requested. The Alliance Party said that, when the issue of decommissioning became

central in 1994, one idea put forward was the twin track approach which the International Body had subsequently adopted. That was as successful an approach as could be adopted in the circumstances. Subsequent experience supported the idea of the two track approach with decommissioning being supervised by an independent commission. The Alliance Party had never perceived decommissioning as being a separate strand of the talks. The line of authority of the independent commission should run directly to the two Governments as in the case of the International Body. The independent commission should have a liaison with the talks. Unionists are concerned that nationalists would find ways to obfuscate, but suspicions go in both directions.

41. The DUP said that this scenario would leave the unionists involved in the three strands without any control over decommissioning. The Alliance Party said that it should not be beyond the parties' ingenuity to delay political progress so as to remain in step with the decommissioning process. The Alliance Party's proposal was really a continuation of the twin-track approach taking account of recent experience. It was important that the proposed independent commission should have whistle-blowing powers.

42. The SDLP asked where the Alliance Party would see the debate on legislation, and the elaboration of the modalities, taking place. The Alliance Party said that the enabling legislation would be going through before Christmas. One of the party's concerns with decommissioning and the creation of a sub-committee to deal with the matter was the prospect of spending endless periods in unproductive debate within such a sub-committee. It was not really a matter for the parties to supervise decommissioning.

43. The SDLP said that there had to be more than just a liaison mechanism between the parties at the talks and the proposed independent commission. The Alliance Party said that most of the questions from the participants in the talks to the commission would relate solely to progress. The main concern of the Party was the inevitable politicising of decommissioning if the matter was handled within the talks. There was no objection to a committee of the talks being appointed for liaison with the Commission, but the line of authority on decommissioning should be outside the talks.

44. The British Government said that it was desirable for itself and other participants to have some time for reflection at this point, and some bilaterals. It was also desirable for participants to write down some conclusions. Accordingly it was proposing that there should be no plenary session on Monday. The DUP asked when determination of the decommissioning issue would come. The British Government said that the matter was still the subject of discussion by the participants. The DUP asked if the parties would have further opportunity for input. The Chairman said he understood that the British Government had invited such input.

45. The UUP said that there had been a lot of material today and time was required for digestion. The DUP said it needed time to consider the matter. The UDP agreed that Monday should be reserved for bilaterals. The PUP proposed that the next week should be reserved for bilaterals. The UKUP agreed that there should be no plenary on Monday and suggested that it might be useful to have a plenary on Tuesday at the call of the Chair. The SDLP suggested that the Chairmen's staff should assess the needs. The Alliance

party stressed the need to maintain momentum and supported the UKUP proposal.

46. The UDP proposed that the next Plenary be on Wednesday morning. The PUP agreed with the DUP's position, stressing the Forum obligation and the strain on the smaller parties in meeting all commitments. The NIWC supported the UDP proposal. The SDLP proposed that documents be circulated for a plenary on Wednesday at the call of the Chairman. The DUP suggested a meeting of the Business Committee. The Alliance Party said that all parties had commitments but that there was no reason why proposals could not be submitted by midday on Tuesday with a plenary on Wednesday at 10.00. The UKUP supported that proposal.

47. The DUP expressed preference for the SDLP proposal. The UUP expressed sympathy for the Alliance Party's concern on momentum but felt that time was needed to consider developments. After further discussion the Chairman proposed that documents be submitted by 10.00 am on Wednesday and that the next plenary be on Monday week at noon. He suggested that the documents should be more concise than the opening decommissioning documents. The DUP considered that only principles and points were needed.

48. The participants approved the Chairman's proposal and he adjourned the session at 17.50.

Independent Chairmen Notetakers
14 November 1996

OIC/PS47