

PROPOSITIONS ON HEADS OF AGREEMENT

Suggested response to questions about the status of the document [an embryo procedural motion]

1. The British and Irish Governments made their attitude clear in the press release which accompanied the publication of their paper of 12 January.
2. The propositions in that paper are intended to facilitate and promote debate and discussion. The various elements, taken together, offer only the outline of an acceptable agreement. They derive from the views of the participants on the issues which have arisen in the talks - as expressed in bilateral meetings and in the various round table discussions which have taken place. They represent the two Governments' best guess at what could be a generally acceptable outcome.
3. Parties may feel able to welcome and support the Propositions on Heads of Agreement as a significant contribution to the development to a broad understanding the key elements of a settlement, and the two Governments would welcome that.
4. However, the Governments appreciate that the propositions need to be elucidated in detailed discussion before parties could reasonably be expected to assess the overall impact of the proposals. They accept that it may therefore be more appropriate for participants to note the paper, without commitment, as a high level statement of the two Governments' views on the key elements of a settlement and the balances which need to be struck between them. They propose that the participants should, on that basis, proceed to engage in the necessary tough detailed negotiation on the specific issues identified in the paper and reserve their judgement on the package as a whole until those detailed negotiations have been completed.
5. In view of the limited amount of time now remaining to complete the substantive negotiations the two Governments further propose, for the parties' consideration, that it would be helpful to schedule business in the substantive political negotiations over the next few weeks so that parties can prepare themselves properly for the discussion of particular topics (eg through tabling papers in advance) and to ensure that all the issues are adequately debated before the next review plenary, which we envisage will take place in early March.