

Statement by the Independent Chairmen

Formats

1. At today's meeting of the Review Plenary, the participants confirmed their view that the most likely means of achieving progress is through small sub-groups meeting in restricted numbers. It has been agreed, therefore, that the negotiations should be taken forward along the following lines, based on the three Strands structure:

Chairman's Group

- The Sub-Group established by the Review Plenary meeting on 2 December will remain in being and serve to facilitate the completion of the negotiations, under the direction of the Plenary. To be called the Chairman's Group, it will have the same composition as the Sub-Group established on 2 December, with the addition of two supporting staff.

Institutional Arrangements

- The Chairman's Group will deal, where appropriate, with future institutional arrangements across the three Strands, including their relationships with each other. It will also discuss the nature, composition, powers, functions and responsibilities of any institutions arising under Strands Two and Three.
- A separate sub-group of Strand One, comprising two members per delegation, and two supporting staff, will be established to deal with such matters in relation to Strand One arrangements.

Constitutional Issues

- The two Governments will bring forward to the Chairman's Group, for its consideration, proposals for amendments to the Irish Constitution and British constitutional legislation required as part of balanced constitutional change. The Group will also discuss arrangements for the validation of an overall agreement.

Rights and Safeguards

- A Sub-Committee of the Plenary, operating under the supervision of the Chairman's Group, will deal with the protection of human, civil and cultural rights and constitutional and institutional safeguards for new agreed arrangements, including justice, prisoners and policing.

A separate sub-committee of Strand One, comprising two members per delegation and two supporting staff, will deal with such matters in relation to that Strand.

Confidence Issues

- Participants have also agreed that the Sub-Committee on Confidence Building Measures should meet more frequently after the Christmas break to carry

forward its programme of work.

Key Issues/Intensive Programme of Work

2. Since the first meeting of the Review Plenary on 2 December, the Sub-Group established on that day has been working intensively towards agreement on a detailed list of key issues requiring to be resolved. In my view, this Sub-Group undertook valuable work and established considerable common ground in regard to a range of issues. In regard to a small number of core matters, however, particular difficulties were encountered. These related to what in effect were matters of substance in negotiating terms for participants. Accordingly, it was felt that the details of these issues should be more properly addressed and taken forward in the substantive negotiations due to commence on 12 January, in the formats outlined above. It will be possible in the appropriate formats, without prejudice to any participant's position, for all participants to raise any specific matters of concern to them.

Conclusion

3. I believe these agreements to be further modest but significant steps forward. I am convinced that the participants are committed to making progress. As I say, the exercise of the last few weeks has been valuable in terms of identifying common ground and clarifying the scope of the core difficulties requiring to be resolved. An intensive programme of work towards establishing agreement on all issues involved will commence on 12 January in the new formats agreed. I remain hopeful that, with continued goodwill, our efforts will succeed.