

Initial Remarks by Secretary of State

- [1. Support Chairman's proposals regarding procedure.]
2. I would like to add to the statement I made at the beginning of yesterday's business; and to address some misconceptions about this process which are going around.
3. First this is not a court of law. These are political negotiations and it is in that context that this procedure arises. The purpose of requiring all participants to affirm their total and absolute commitment to the Mitchell principles was to ensure that there was a level playing field in these negotiations - to create confidence among the participants.
4. I am not acting unilaterally. My actions are governed by the rules of this process - rules which the parties starting this process agreed; and it is the integrity of that process which we all around this table want to protect. In maintaining that integrity it is crucial that everyone is treated fairly and equally. We have done so in the past and are doing so again now.
5. The purpose of requiring commitment to the Mitchell principles is to provide reassurance that these political negotiations are taking place on a level playing field. That is the underlying reason why the participants agreed to incorporate rule 29 in the rules of procedure. The particular procedure envisaged in that rule must of course be applied impartially.
6. I initiated this procedure because it was the British Government which received the information from the Chief Constable that, in his view, the IRA authorised and was responsible for the murders of Mr Campbell and Mr Dougan.
7. If it were possible to go further and share with you the intelligence and all the other evidence on which his assessment was made I would. But I cannot, not least because that could seriously prejudice current court proceedings and constitute a breach of the Contempt of Court Act.
8. However, I can say that the Chief Constable has briefed me fully on the circumstances of these two murders and I and the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, have had the opportunity to fully examine the information and evidence available to the Chief Constable. As a result both Tony Blair and I accept and agree with the Chief Constable's assessment that the IRA authorised and was responsible for these murders.
9. It is now for both governments to consider all the information available and to make a rounded judgement together. It will be a joint decision.
10. Our conclusions will reflect discussions between ourselves and what we hear this afternoon from Sinn Fein and all the parties round this table.

11. We believe that the procedure you have outlined, Chair, will provide a full and fair basis for the two Governments' eventual determination.