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STATEMENT BY THE INDEPENDENT CHAIRMEN

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 16, 1997

From December 3 through today, December 16, the Sub-Group met several times in an intensive effort to reach agreement on; (1) a statement of the key issues to be resolved; and (2) the format for resolving these issues when the talks resume in January.

The participants did not reach agreement, although there was a significant measure of common ground. While the inability to reach agreement is regrettable, the real question is whether they are prepared to deal with the issues in a serious way. I believe they are. I believe that the participants are committed to making progress. So I expect there to be substantive discussions when the talks resume on January 12 in Belfast.

The participants did agree on the schedule for carrying forward the negotiations. The Strand One participants will meet on Monday, January 12 and the Strand Two participants will meet on Tuesday, January 13. The Business Committee will meet on Monday, January 12. The Liaison Subcommittee on Confidence Building Measures will meet on Tuesday, January 13. The Liaison Subcommittee on Decommissioning will meet on Wednesday, January 14.

The discussions over the last few weeks have been valuable in identifying common ground and clarifying the key issues to be resolved. I hope the participants will build on this effort and that they will summon a new commitment to act decisively early in the new year.

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