

Office of the Independent Chairmen

Castle Buildings Stormont Belfast BT4 3SG Northern Ireland
Telephone 01232 522957 Facsimile 01232 768905

MEETING OF LIAISON SUB-COMMITTEE ON DECOMMISSIONING TUESDAY 25 NOVEMBER 1997 (1405)

CHAIRMAN: Mr Holkeri

THOSE PRESENT: International Independent Commission
British Government
Irish Government

Alliance
Labour
Northern Ireland Women's Coalition
Progressive Unionist Party
Sinn Féin
Social Democratic & Labour Party
Ulster Democratic Party
Ulster Unionist Party

1. The Chairman (Mr Holkeri) convened the meeting at 1405 and stated that this was the third meeting of the Liaison Sub-committee on Decommissioning. The Chairman said that he wished to seek approval of the previous records from 8 October and 17 November. The draft record of 8 October had been circulated and he asked for any comments on this. Hearing none the Chairman declared these approved as circulated. The Chairman stated that the 17 November record had been distributed that morning and he therefore proposed that approval of it be deferred until the next meeting. This was agreed.

dec.03/97

2. The Chairman said the business of the day was to consider the Initial Report of the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning. The Chairman said he had been informed that the Report had been circulated on Friday 21 November and it had been agreed at last week's meeting of the Sub Committee that the three Commissioners be invited today to present the Report. The Chairman introduced the three Commissioners and asked the Chairman of the Independent International Commission to commence the presentation.

3. The Commission's Chairman said participants would have read the Initial Report and would know that the Commission was given a four-fold remit from the Governments: the first was to consult on the scheme or schemes which might be used for decommissioning, including the role it might play in such schemes; the second was to present proposals to the Governments on such schemes; the third was to undertake decommissioning schemes in accordance with the legislation passed in both jurisdictions; and the fourth was to report periodically to both Governments and to the participants in the talks. The Commission's Chairman said the purpose of the Initial Report to the Governments and the participants, and the purpose of the meeting was to respond to the fourth remit. In the report itself the Commission had addressed key issues arising from the first two elements of its remit.

4. The Chairman of the Commission said that during the two months in which the Commission had been in existence, it had consulted widely on decommissioning. It had met with each of the political parties, some of them several times. It had met with Ministers from both Governments and it had had several meetings with officials in both Governments. The Commission had had numerous meetings with the RUC and the British Army, and with the Garda Siochana and the Irish Defence Force; and it had responded to several requests from individuals involved in the talks to brief them on progress.

5. The Chairman of the Commission said that, as the title suggested, the report was an initial one. He said participants would note that it had based its examination of schemes on the four proposals made by the International Body and it was applying the same principles it had proposed for that process including: completeness of destruction, verification, prohibition against forensic testing, and safety of the public. He said that as to schemes, none with whom the Commission had spoken with had suggested schemes other than the four proposed by the International Body. Some had made it clear they felt the last two were the only ones likely to be acceptable to those who held illegal weapons in this voluntary decommissioning process. The Chairman of the Commission said he was referring here to decommissioning based on information leading to the location of arms, or else the destruction of arms by paramilitary groups themselves with verification by the Commission.

6. The Chairman of the Commission said that for the next several weeks work within the Commission would continue to refine the issue of schemes and to work out detailed operational procedures to be applied in each decommissioning event. But the fact remained, as stated by the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach in their joint statement on 15 September that "successful decommissioning will depend on the co-operation of the paramilitary organisations themselves and cannot in practice be imposed on them as a pre-requisite for successful negotiation or as an absolute obligation". The Chairman of the Commission said it would continue to develop the means whereby decommissioning could take place, but ultimately it would be up to those who had the illegal weapons to agree to decommission them. It was to be hoped that growing confidence and trust, as the talks progressed, would help to make that possible. The Chairman of the Commission concluded his opening remarks by thanking the Sub Committee for the opportunity to appear before it and looked forward to listening to the views of the participants.

7. The Chairman, on behalf of the Sub-committee, thanked the Commission for its report and presentation. He said he now wished to embark on a tour de table to allow participants express their views and called on the British Government to begin first. The British Government said it wished to pass on the Secretary of State's regrets at being unable to be present in person on this important occasion. Unfortunately unavoidable

commitments elsewhere had prevented her and her colleagues from attending as they would have wished.

8. The British Government said it wished to thank the Commission for the comments from its Chairman and for the very helpful initial report. It said it applauded the considerable progress already made by the three Commissioners and their continuing commitment to taking forward the further work necessary to bring about the decommissioning of illegal arms. The British Government said it believed that the continuing work of the Commission could make a vital contribution towards implementing all aspects of decommissioning as set out in the Report of the International Body. Along with the Irish Government, it saw the resolution of the decommissioning issue as an indispensable part of the process of negotiation. That was why, building on the legislation enacted earlier this year, the Secretary of State joined with the Irish Government in August to sign the International Agreement setting up the Independent Commission and to take a range of other steps.

9. The British Government continued and said that the Commission's functions under the Agreement were to consult with the participants in negotiations on schemes for decommissioning; to present proposals for such schemes; to undertake such tasks as may be required of it to facilitate decommissioning in accordance with such schemes; and to report to both Governments and to the Sub-committee. The initial report, as the

Commission had said, addressed key issues related to the first two of these functions. On the first - consultation - the British Government said it appreciated the fact that the Commission had had a wide range of discussions, including with both Governments; and welcomed the important point brought out in the report that during those consultations no one expressed any fundamental objections to the guidelines for the decommissioning effort drawn up by the International Body and re-affirmed by the Commission.

10. The British Government said that on the second function, the Commission would now build on the work set out in its initial report to develop proposals for schemes. The proposals and the resulting schemes would make the essential link between the legislation enacted in both jurisdictions and the operational aspects of the process addressed in the report. The schemes would include details of the amnesty period during which arms can be decommissioned with no risk of prosecution, and with the statutory prohibitions on forensic testing being scrupulously observed, and more specific procedures for the methods of decommissioning. As both Governments would actually make the schemes, the British Government said it would be important for there to be continuing consultation with both Governments on the key legal and practical issues. The British Government said it would work closely with the Irish Government on these. It said it was also sure that during the next phase, the Commission would continue to be available to all participants for discussion and engagement on the issues. As

the Procedural Motion of 24 September indicated, the Sub-committee would also have the opportunity to consider the proposals for schemes drawn up by the Independent Commission, and to submit any agreed opinion on those proposals for its consideration.

11. The British Government said it wished to make two specific points arising from the initial report. First it was committed to the total disarmament of all paramilitary organisations on the basis recommended by the International Body. It recognised that successful decommissioning would depend on the voluntary co-operation of those organisations, and could not be imposed on them. To give that co-operation the paramilitaries would need to have confidence in the arrangements and in what the Commission described as the “integrity of the decommissioning process”. The British Government said the Commission was clearly committed to working to develop that confidence. For its part, the British Government said it was wholly committed to implementing the amnesty and prohibitions on testing resulting from compliance with a scheme. It said it was equally important that all parties in the process engaged constructively to assist the Commission and help bring decommissioning schemes to a successful outcome.

12. Secondly, the British Government said both Governments would like to see the decommissioning of some paramilitary arms during negotiations, and believed that this could be a major contribution to confidence building

and the momentum towards agreement. It recognised also that decommissioning was most likely to take place alongside progress in the negotiations and, indeed, in other areas. What it wanted to see - in the words of the International Body, of which the Commission reminded everyone - was a progressive pattern of mounting trust and confidence. The British Government said it was willing to play a responsible and full part in developing such a pattern. And as part of that effort, it welcomed the continuing work of the Sub-committee on Confidence Building Measures, which would be meeting the following week to begin a detailed examination of issues of concern to participants.

13. The British Government said the Commission had described its work so far as a possible "road-map for decommissioning". It deserved everyone's gratitude. The British Government urged that those holding illegal weapons should build on the foundation of the cease-fires and show their willingness to walk down the road which the Commission had described. Both it, and all the participants in the negotiations, had to continue to be willing to take risks in order to achieve the unique opportunity to arrive at lasting peace.

14. The Irish Government also apologised for the absence of Ministers in its delegation. It said that it wished to thank the members of the Commission for their Initial report and their presentation on it to the Sub-Committee. Since the Commission's formal establishment on 24 September, and indeed

before that, its members had been working steadily. This report was the first fruit of their labour. The Irish Government said the Commission had consulted widely. The care and thoroughness with which it had undertaken those consultations was reflected in the Report. It was an extremely useful contribution to the ongoing work on the complex issue of decommissioning. The Irish Government said it welcomed the tabling of the Report within the Sub-committee and was pleased to be participating in the debate on it.

15. The Irish Government said it had long recognised the importance of securing the decommissioning of arms held illegally both in the Republic and in Northern Ireland. It would also - as the Taoiseach had made clear in his joint statement with the Prime Minister - like to see the decommissioning of some paramilitary arms during the negotiations as progress was made in the political talks. This was because it believed that decommissioning was capable of underpinning the peace process in a way that was both real and symbolic. The Irish Government said it had equally long recognised that a basic and inescapable reality was that decommissioning can only be effected by those who had actual possession of the arms and in circumstances where they were prepared to decommission. Decommissioning was therefore something entirely different from seizures as a result of law enforcement. The Commission, in making the point that the co-operation of paramilitary organisations would be essential to any successful decommissioning scheme, quite rightly reminded everyone that voluntary decommissioning had never been tried on this island before and that there was no historical precedent for

what it was proposing. The Irish Government said it fell to everyone therefore to seek to create the conditions which would facilitate voluntary decommissioning.

16. The Irish Government said the International Body identified the close relationship which existed between decommissioning and the broader enterprise on which all were engaged in the talks. It also recognised that what was ultimately essential if the gun was to be taken out of Irish politics was an agreed political settlement and the total verifiable decommissioning of all paramilitary organisations. The reality that everyone had to cope with was that progress on decommissioning could not be divorced from the need to secure political progress in the negotiations.

17. The Irish Government said it now wished to turn to the Commission's Initial Report itself and respond to some of the key issues it raised. The Irish Government said the Commission had sought, in its own words, to address a number of key issues related to the mandate which had been entrusted to it. To that end, the Report had identified a number of important key elements which would be a necessary part of decommissioning and suggested how these might be incorporated in schemes by reference to a coherent scenario for decommissioning itself. The key element of any decommissioning scheme which the Commission identified were the requirements for a set standard for verification, complete destruction of arms, compliance with statutory prohibitions, and regard to the requirements of public safety. These

in turn reflected the six overarching guidelines identified by the International Body as being necessary to inform any successful scheme of decommissioning. The Commission had adopted those principles and used them as a guiding strategy for the proposals it made. The Irish Government said it accepted those principles on publication of the International Body's Report and its Decommissioning Act 1997 was framed in a way which would enable them to be given effect. It welcomed the fact that those consulted by the Commission were also happy to subscribe to those guidelines for the purposes of decommissioning when it occurred.

18. The Irish Government said the Commission also referred, in this connection, to the importance of strict adherence to the statutory prohibitions on forensic testing etc. The Decommissioning Act 1997 would have the effect, not only of prohibiting the forensic examination of decommissioned arms, but also of prohibiting the use of those arms, information obtained in the course of or as a result of decommissioning, and evidence of anything done for the purposes of decommissioning in criminal proceedings by or on behalf of the State. The Act also prohibited the taking of proceedings in relation to any offence that might be committed as part of the decommissioning process itself. The Irish Government said it would naturally ensure that those prohibitions were understood and adhered to by any agencies under its control which may be involved in the decommissioning process.

19. The Irish Government said the Commission in their report also concluded that the four options for decommissioning identified by the International Body were feasible. In its view, the two options most likely to be used were destruction by those holding arms and the provision of information leading to the collection of arms and their subsequent destruction. It did not, however, exclude the use of the other two options at this stage and, in addition, made clear that it remained open to suggestions for options beyond the four identified by the International Body. The legislation enacted by both Governments would enable provision to be made for any of the four options identified by the International Body or variations on them. The Irish Government said it remained open to schemes based on any or all of these options including those options which the Commission had identified as being the most likely to be utilised.

20. With regard to the operational features of decommissioning in accordance with those options, the Irish Government said the Commission's Report rightly stressed the requirements of public safety. It would be important, whatever method or methods of decommissioning was or were chosen, for the procedures to be such as to ensure the safety of both the general public and those engaged in the decommissioning process itself. The basic scenario which the Commission sketched out for the decommissioning process itself would involve a key role for the Commission in overseeing the process, with particular reference to the verification function. The Irish Government said it saw such a role as providing a potentially valuable

contribution to public confidence in the process and welcomed such an involvement by the Commission.

21. The Irish Government said the Commission also raised the question of technical assistance which it would need to have at its disposal in order to fulfil the tasks which would be given to it in decommissioning and set out a number of possibilities in this report. The Irish Government said it remained open to all the options presented and acknowledged that each offered its own advantages. It was also satisfied that the Garda Síochána and the Defence Forces could, if required, perform the tasks envisaged by the Commission. Any such participation would, of course, be in accordance with the Decommissioning Act 1997 and the regulations made under it. The Irish Government said it would naturally be particularly interested in hearing the views of other parties to this process and the views of those groups being asked to decommission in relation to this issue. The Irish Government said that the Report, in the words of the Commission, represented their initial proposals and a possible road-map for decommissioning which were for consideration by the Governments and the parties. Those proposals themselves involved choices as between alternative courses of action in a number of important respects. The Commission also made clear that it was open to alternative approaches which respected the principles against which its own proposals had been framed.

22. The Irish Government said that the Report therefore represented a valuable contribution to the process of taking forward work on the decommissioning issue. It believed that it could play an important part in securing agreement on the requirements which would be essential to any decommissioning schemes. It believed that it could also facilitate a process of further engagement which would enable those requirements to be more precisely specified, thus providing the basis for schemes capable of securing the co-operation of paramilitary groups. Those requirements would then need to be reflected in the schemes the Governments would make in accordance with their respective legislation. The Irish Government said any such schemes should, as the Commission suggested, be flexible and easy to operate.

23. The Irish Government said more work clearly remained to be done in developing schemes for decommissioning and incorporating them in the regulations and schemes to be made in accordance with the legislation in both jurisdictions. The Governments and the Commission were already considering the issues which would arise and were pressing ahead with this work. The Governments would continue to engage in close contact with the Commission to this end. It said it would also clearly see it as important for the Commission to continue to consult with the parties for this purpose both in the light of their reaction to the Report and as the Commission further developed its work. It saw the continuing involvement of the parties in this process as essential to the success of any decommissioning schemes.

24. In conclusion, the Irish Government once again expressed its thanks to the Commission for the Report and looked forward to the results of its continuing work and consultations. The Irish Government, for its part, would continue its work to ensure that decommissioning became a reality as soon as possible. It looked forward to hearing the views of the other participants in the Sub-committee on the Report and to taking those into account in its continuing contacts with the Commission.

25. Alliance welcomed the Report and appreciated the work of the Commission to date. The party said that decommissioning was a voluntary process which required the co-operation of those who had the weapons to willingly commit themselves to decommission them. Alliance said the real question in all of this was did these people wish to show any sign of this commitment. The party said that decommissioning was not a one off act. It involved planning, discussing and so on in advance of any actual decommissioning. Alliance said it was looking for any evidence on this basis. Decommissioning was a vital confidence building measure but for the moment Alliance said there was no satisfactory answer to its earlier question. The party said it was looking for serious engagement on this issue and hoped this would materialise soon.

26. Labour said it agreed Alliance's comments and also with paragraph 12 in the Commission's Report that "the fundamental challenge for

decommissioning is not technical but psychological". The party said, like Alliance, it also believed that confidence needed to be built in on the road to decommissioning. The party said it looked forward to further consultations with the Commission and others on the issue.

27. The NIWC welcomed the Report and welcomed the statements contained in it referring to the voluntary nature of any decommissioning process. The party said it hoped people would take on board what was in the Report. It then asked whether the Commission was working to a specific timescale for submitting schemes to both Governments. The Chairman of the Commission stated there was no specific timescale in place. However, should the Commission receive an invitation from a organisation willing to decommission weapons then he knew that that would be accommodated swiftly, using the existing road-map and structure by both Governments. Much, however, depended on the wishes of the organisation and whether outside experts were required for that process. The Chairman of the Commission said that the real answer to the NIWC point was "as soon as possible".

28. The PUP began by saying that it was both disturbed and concerned that an Irish Times article had appeared over the weekend quoting extracts from the Commission's Report. The party said there was plenty of talk around about building confidence, yet someone had leaked the Report already. The party said this didn't amount to much confidence building and

it was time people started to be serious about the whole issue since lives were at risk. The PUP said conditions needed to be created to enable a broader vision to develop, not just on decommissioning, but on the whole picture which would involve everyone. The party said it had to be remembered that decommissioning didn't mean that only those with the weapons had to take risks. Both Governments also needed to take risks in moving matters forward.

29. Sinn Féin said decommissioning was one element in the wider scene of demilitarisation within the context of a lasting settlement. The party said it was widely accepted that decommissioning would only occur on a voluntary basis and that the necessary confidence needed to be established for this to happen. Sinn Féin said it rested on its democratic mandate and was committed to peaceful means. The party said that in relation to issues such as the modalities, structures and legislation connected to decommissioning, all these could be sorted out in a matter of hours if the will was there to do so. Decommissioning, however, had to happen in the context of a wider settlement. The talks process had made a start on this but much work remained to be done. Sinn Féin said the IRA and nationalists generally had demonstrated the will to create a process of substance towards building peace, but not all groups were in a peace mode. Paramilitary beatings and shootings continued and this was evidence that some people wanted to pursue war and not peace.

30. Sinn Féin continued with this theme and said that there had been no apparent response to the IRA cease-fire from the British Government. The numbers of soldiers had remained virtually unchanged. Recent withdrawals had had only a marginal effect. Yet searching, harassment and raids continued. A very physical and military presence remained in areas such as south Armagh. Furthermore major refurbishment work continued at security force bases. Sinn Féin said these actions didn't create confidence in the nationalist community for a lasting solution or for those who held weapons.

31. Sinn Féin said it wanted to see all the guns removed within the general context of the demilitarisation of current society. The party said its position went further than the International Body and the Independent International Commission. But such a situation couldn't be addressed until the role of British Military Intelligence and other similar organisations was laid bare. If one was to consider decommissioning then one had to consider the supply of weapons and put an end to this as well. In this regard Sinn Féin said the supply of weapons to loyalist paramilitaries from South Africa through British Intelligence agents needed to be fully examined. Some 229 nationalist killings had occurred since Brian Nelson, once an agent in the UDA, had supplied such arms to loyalists. The party said the whole area of collusion between loyalists and the security forces had to be laid bare. Sinn Féin said the British Government should publish in full the Report of the Stephens Inquiry and make it available to the Sub-committee.

32. At this point Sinn Féin was interrupted and the Chairman appealed for continuance of the debate without further interruption. The PUP said if Sinn Féin was attacking it with comments then it would return the compliment. The party asked whether such comments from Sinn Féin were related to the building of confidence. The PUP said each participant could attack one another but where would this get anyone? The real question was whether Sinn Féin was serious about the peace process. If one looked at the recent City Hall bomb or the surveillance of loyalist homes, this seemed to cast doubt on Sinn Féin's sincerity. The Chairman reminded participants that each was entitled to be treated as he or she expected to be treated by others.

33. The SDLP welcomed the Report. It noted it had been drawn up in compliance with the remit of the Independent International Commission as well as complying with the spirit and principles of the International Body. The party said those who wished to argue against this position needed to present those arguments clearly and logically. The SDLP said everyone was present to discuss the contents based on the principles outlined in the Report. The party said it noted also the smooth blending of military and diplomatic minds in the Report's compilation and considered that its release and other impending discussions suggested that there was a gathering of momentum in the negotiations. The party said it recognised that this was a cautionary statement, but it believed that such momentum could be discerned.

34. The SDLP said that while it accepted the position of having voluntary decommissioning alongside progress in the 3 strands, it urged that progress needed to be made in the latter area. In the interim the party would continue to use any political or moral influence to encourage voluntary decommissioning since it was the most important confidence building measure in the talks process. Decommissioning should give the process a real boost when it started but the issue couldn't be advanced in isolation. The party said hopefully paramilitary organisations would respond to the Commission if progress was made on other fronts. The SDLP said it recognised that much work needed to be done and it looked forward to further reports from the Commission. It noted that consultation and co-operation would continue with participants and the Commission as often and as effectively as possible.

35. The UDP welcomed the Commission and thanked each of them for the thoroughness of the Report. The party said the decommissioning process was a voluntary one, and no one present at the Sub-committee or the talks had the capacity to enforce decommissioning on paramilitary organisations. The UDP said all had an equal responsibility to use what influence they had in democratic society and have all illegal arms removed. The party said it had heard Sinn Féin's comments to broaden the subject to total demilitarisation. The issue was illegal arms. The remit of the Sub-committee and the IICD was limited to decommissioning of illegal arms. It

was important to stick to this remit. The Report of the International Body had also made no link between legally and illegally held arms.

36. The UDP said that it was difficult at this point to see loyalist groups giving up their arms while the threat to the loyalist community continued. Some republican groups were still engaged in military activity. The IRA had posed the most serious threat to the community, and while their violence was currently in abeyance, no one was in a position to say for how long. The UDP said that at the end of 1995 the CLMC had offered a confidence building measure with a "no first strike" pledge which had not been reciprocated by the IRA - not surprisingly as they made a first strike at Canary Wharf shortly afterwards. The party said the loyalist community, quite rightly, lacked confidence at present that this threat had been removed, and decommissioning by loyalist paramilitaries would therefore be problematical.

37. The UUP recalled that in paragraph 25 of its, the International Body had concluded that there was a clear commitment by those in possession of arms to work constructively to achieve decommissioning as part of the negotiations, but not prior to negotiations. The party said everyone was now in those negotiations. The UUP asked did that "clear commitment" still hold or had the position changed since 1994? The party also referred to the Procedural Motion, and to the statement that the Plenary had agreed that decommissioning was an "indispensable part of the negotiating process" -

not divorced from but part of the process, alongside other confidence building measures. This was the relevant background to the Subcommittee's meeting.

38. The UUP said it was profoundly disappointed by the Initial Report, which showed that very little progress had been made in two months. It had been told that schemes could be put in place almost immediately if necessary, but nothing had happened as yet. The legislation was not in place to support either amnesties or prohibition and the Governments had given no indications of timescales for these yet the process was supposed to be working to a deadline of next May. The UUP said it considered that the decommissioning issue was being strung along, and that the Governments did not intend to face up to the issue or the paramilitaries. Decommissioning remained an indispensable part of the process, and the party wanted to know the timescale for legislation, which needed to be in place quickly. The present "road-map" wouldn't facilitate decommissioning. The party said it was either being strung along or it wanted to see serious and positive progress on this issue. Were Governments prepared to deal with it seriously and rapidly?

39. The UUP said it was tired of the hypocrisy of Sinn Féin talking about demilitarisation while engaging in intimidation outside the building and making veiled threats. Republicanism demanded endless concessions but offered nothing in return. Confidence building had to be a two way street.

There had been no progress on other confidence building measures, such as locating the bodies of those who had disappeared or permitting the return of those who had been forced to leave Northern Ireland by death threats. How was the Commission going to ascertain the views of the paramilitaries and test if there was a "clear commitment" on decommissioning? The UUP said the Report of the International Body (paragraph 35) had looked to the process of decommissioning to build confidence during the negotiations. But there had been no progress on decommissioning, so why should it have any confidence in Sinn Féin?

40. Sinn Féin said it was a pity the UUP had not engaged in the earlier negotiations with the same energy as it had shown today. For its part, the British Government could not just wash its hands of its role in arming loyalist paramilitaries. On the question of missing people, Sinn Féin had said publicly, but it bore repeating, that anyone having information on the whereabouts of missing people or their remains should communicate this to the families. Sinn Féin said that if the process was to lay the groundwork for the hand over of weapons, it had to create the conditions in which those who held them would feel disposed to do so. For the nationalist people, nothing had happened on the ground to show that the British Government had changed its attitude - no let up on patrolling etc. The ongoing building and reinforcing of police and army fortresses and watchtowers suggested a Government preparing only for war.

41. Alliance said it shared the concern that as regards decommissioning everyone could receive ever more detailed "road-maps" but never have anywhere to go. The party asked if the Independent Commission had had contact with representatives of the paramilitary organisations. The UUP said that if questions of the supply of weapons were to be raised, the party would wish to raise the issue of the arming of the Provisional IRA by Irish Government Ministers in the early 1970's.
42. The British Government said it wished to address some issues which Sinn Féin had suggested were inhibiting confidence, but these were in the remit of the other Sub-committee, on confidence building measures. The British Government rejected, however, the suggestion that its security forces had been involved in arming loyalist paramilitaries. While the UUP was concerned at progress being slow, the British Government said it felt it was sensible for the Commission to engage in wide consultations as it had. As regards the legislation, this was in place. There was no further legislation required in Northern Ireland to provide for schemes of decommissioning.
43. The Irish Government said that its enabling legislation was in place. All necessary work to the end of implementing schemes of decommissioning - making regulations, for example - was being done as quickly as possible. The Irish Government rejected the UUP inference that Irish Government Ministers were involved in arming the Provisional IRA.

44. The Chairman of the Commission said it had not been in direct contact with the paramilitaries. It had approached parties whom it thought could help in this regard to ask the paramilitary organisations for their views on the type of schemes of decommissioning they could accept and with whom they could deal. In response, one organisation had thus far designated a political representative as a point of contact for the Commission. No organisation had said it was ready, as of now, to begin decommissioning, although none had not been asked this question specifically. The Chairman of the Commission said it was also concerned about the activities of groups not engaged in the cease-fires, and the activities of these groups had introduced an element which was not present at the time the International Body was drawing up its Report.

45. Sinn Féin and the UUP repeated their earlier points about the alleged supply of arms by each Governments to paramilitary organisations. The Commission intervened to say that its job was not to concern itself with where war materials had come from but how they were to be disposed of. It was neither desirable nor useful to try to investigate who might have armed whom.

46. The Chairman said he would report back to the review Plenary that the Liaison Sub-committee had met and discussed the Commission's Initial Report. The Chairman said he would expect to convene the next meeting when there were more developed proposals available or when it was

otherwise useful. The meeting was adjourned, to the call of the Chair, at 1535.

Independent Chairmen Notetakers
3 December 1997