INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT
INDEPENDENT INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION ON DECOMMISSIONING

25 November 1997

Mr Chairmen

The participants will have read the Initial Report and will know that the Commission was given a four-fold remit from the Governments: the first was to consult on the scheme or schemes that might be used for decommissioning, including the role we 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 purpose of our Initial Report to the Governments and the participants, and the purpose of this meeting today, is to respond to that fourth remit.

During the two months the Commission has been in existence we have consulted widely on decommissioning. We have met with each of the political parties, some of them several times. We have met with Ministers from both Governments and we have had several meetings at the officials level, again with both Governments. We have had numerous meetings with the RUC

and the British Army, and with the Garda Siochana and the Irish Defence Force; and we have responded to several requests from individuals involved in the talks to brief them on progress.

As its title suggests, Mr Chairman, the report is an initial one. You will note that we have based our examination of schemes on the four proposals made by the International Body and we are applying the same principles they proposed for that process including: completeness of destruction, verification, prohibition against forensic testing, and safety of the public.

As to schemes, none with whom we have talked have suggested schemes other than the four proposed by the International Body. Some have made it clear they feel the last two are the only ones likely to be acceptable to those who hold illegal weapons in this voluntary decommissioning process. Here I am referring 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.

For the next several weeks work within the Commission is continuing to refine the issue of schemes and to work out detailed operational procedures to be applied in each decommissioning event.

The fact remains, Mr Chairman, as stated by the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach in their Joint Statement on 15 September, and here I quote:

> ***"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".***

Thus we will continue to put in place the means whereby decommissioning can take place, but ultimately it will be up to those who have the illegal weapons to agree to decommission them. It is to be hoped that growing confidence and trust as these talks progress, will help to make that possible.

That is all I propose to say by way of introduction, Mr Chairman. We thank you for the opportunity to appear before this sub-committee and we are eager to listen to your views.