

Social Democratic and Labour Party

**Liaison Sub-Committee on Confidence-Building
Measures**

October 1997

1. The SDLP has welcomed the establishment of the Liaison Sub-Committee on Confidence Building Measures. In the context of earlier discussion on "decommissioning", we stressed the importance of delegating consideration of other confidence-building measures, as well as decommissioning, to a designated format of the Talks.
2. Such a facility is required to give structural expression to the need for all participants to build confidence through and throughout the peace process, thereby improving confidence at both a political and community level. Confidence-building measures can make a significant contribution to enhancing the climate of negotiations and to ensuring a real and lasting peace. To fail to recognise their significance would be to allow issues, facts, feelings or features which are part of the legacy of violence and division to retard our mission to secure peace and agreement.
3. It is important, however, to acknowledge that there are wider confidence-building requirements on all participants in this process than those which are generally referred to by participants and even the International Body when using the shorthand of "confidence-building measures". Political confidence-building is needed by and between the participants in the various negotiating formats and even outside them. Confidence growth must be generated among and across the parties. It cannot be a matter of parties making their respective demands or bids to governments - or indeed paramilitaries - for "confidence-building" concessions. If "confidence-building" is reduced to tests and rewards, or calculated in this way, it will not effect the political good will and trust that it is supposed to achieve.
4. The procedural motion which established the sub-committee refers to those aspects of confidence-building outlined in the Report of the International Body. The matters in section VII of that Report are significant in themselves. They should not, however, be read as an exclusive agenda for confidence-building but rather as illustrative of the sort of serious and sensitive areas in which positive movement would contribute to overcoming the legacy of violence and division. A basic consideration in establishing the sub-committee was the need to provide a means whereby participants could register concerns not just about the specific issues referred to in the International Body's Report but also about other such issues which may arise which may be held to have implications for their political confidence.
5. Mindful of previous discussions on the context of the sub-committee's deliberations and paragraph 17 of the Rules of Procedure, we believe that a degree of flexibility should influence and inform participants as to what should properly be addressed by the sub-committee. If it is deemed necessary we would support a procedural agreement to this effect in the Plenary.
6. The deliberations of the Sub-Committee should not be a substitute for the negotiations in the respective strands and we should exercise all reasonable care in ensuring that its deliberations do not stray into areas or issues more properly and effectively addressed in the substantive negotiations.

7. The Sub-Committee is not a negotiating arena as such. The rules of "sufficient consensus" or "nothing is agreed until everything is agreed" are not relevant to establishing progress on any of the issues which might be considered in the Sub-Committee. The Sub-Committee cannot direct or determine initiatives or outcomes in these areas.
8. In relation to many issues, it is important to note that particular responsibility rests with a government or governments. The governments have demonstrated that considerations of confidence-building are a key feature of their working relationship. We hope that this will continue and that the work of the Sub-Committee will not restrain government initiative. The Sub-Committee provides a context where governments can outline and explain to all participants such measures as they may take in terms of confidence-building and hear, in turn, the views of participants.
9. Ultimately, the negotiations, the political process generally and the life of the community can only be enhanced by an informed, imaginative and balanced approach to confidence-building measures. Notwithstanding the important role the Sub-Committee can play, wider political confidence can develop only if the participants develop confidence in the conduct, content and conclusions of the negotiations.