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SUBMISSION TO LIAISON SUB-COMMITTEE ON CONFIDENCE BUILDING MEASURES

1. We believe that the aims of the Liaison Committee are,
 - a. to positively assist the development of an environment of mutual confidence and trust between all sections of the people in Northern Ireland,
 - b. to assist the development of confidence in any proposed political agreement that may be reached,
 - c. to assist the development of mutual trust, understanding, respect and co-operation between the participants in the Stormont Talks.
2. The day to day experience and facts of people's lives, constantly confirm that the ordinary people can work together and want to co-operate.
3. The present distrust has been artificially developed and manipulated over the years to divide and to serve narrow political interests. It does not stem from the ordinary people, from their experience, or from their needs.
4. The facts and the history, combined with common sense and an acceptance of the reality that people want to co-operate and work together will lead inevitably to practical answers to the problems we face.
5. All sides have to be prepared to listen and to patiently and calmly present their views and reasons for disagreement. We have to encourage this approach in the main Talks and within society in Northern Ireland as a whole.
6. Within the Talks at the moment some of the participants are refusing to meet directly and refusing to deal with each other's points of view. One argument used is that there is no point, because no one is going to change. Another is that the other side is not sincere. We are strongly opposed to these attitudes and arguments, and ask those adopting them to change their positions and to come in line with the ordinary people they claim to represent.
7. We regard the political parties who are at the talks as representatives of particular communities who cannot be separated from those communities. In our opinion all sides have arrived at their positions because of a historical process and with fundamentally genuine and sincere motives.
8. There has been a major problem in the history of Ireland because of the use of religious differences to foster and explain political differences. If a community is raised in the belief that people of a different religion are enemies, or are in some fundamental way different, then it is inevitable that they will react in a particular way to defend what is perceived as the collective good.
9. We have the responsibility to systematically undo the negative effects of this history and to scientifically, step by step, build mutual trust and confidence and a new united society.
10. **The Liaison Committee should produce a document outlining these principles and encouraging politicians and the community to systematically work to unravel and eliminate the religious sectarianism and communalism that undermines Northern Ireland.**
11. The fundamental political and ideological stumbling block in the Talks has become, who has the right to decide the political future of Northern Ireland? Is it the people of Northern Ireland alone, or should it be the people of the entire island of Ireland? Until this question is resolved, or a compromise reached, it is difficult to envisage real progress in the Talks.
12. Agreement on this question, agreement that is reached through dialogue and that is acceptable to all parties and all communities would be the most powerful "confidence building measure", the Committee could achieve.
13. In the Strand discussions two extremes are being presented. No real progress is being made to

- break down the differences and find common ground.
14. This Committee could provide a means to pursue the rights and wrongs, and the practicalities of the various options.
 15. Up until around the end of the first half of this century issues of this type tended to be decided on the basis of who had the most political and military power. There was a belief that it was acceptable for one country to invade or interfere with another. Such issues should be decided on the basis of fact and justice. There should be no outside interference or manipulation. Part of the difficulty in Northern Ireland is that the problem is spanning two different eras, with two different sets of rules.
 16. In order to reach agreement today there has to be an open and honest acknowledgement of the facts of the history and the present situation. For instance, we believe that the old Stormont government and administration was sectarian and partisan. We think that this should be an openly acknowledged fact, not something that can't be talked about. Not something that is denied or supported depending on what outcome is desired. On the other hand, the previous history of sectarian government does not necessarily mean that Northern Ireland has "failed". To us this is an illogical and unscientific argument. What is wrong with considering the option of eliminating sectarianism and developing new forms of government?
 17. **The issue is so fundamental that it may not be possible to reach agreement on this problem in the short run. It should be possible to clearly define the arguments, the facts and the reasoning. It would be a contribution to confidence building if these were documented and taken out for a period of wider consultation and discussion. The wider discussion would assist the resolution of the issue. The realisation that their leaders were behaving maturely, and seriously and responsibly discussing this central issue, would set an example and help to inspire confidence in the present process.**
 18. **The Committee could have the role of trying to mediate controversial problems as they develop inside and outside the Talks, trying to reach agreement between the different parties on how they should be handled.**
 19. Examples could be,
 - a. the refusal of some parties to participate,
 - b. the refusal of one party to enter into dialogue with another,
 - c. the release and transfer of prisoners, and the recent controversy over this issue.
 - d. the principles that should determine in what way disputes over marches and demonstrations should be dealt with. If we cannot agree on this, for example, there is very little reason why the ordinary people should have confidence in our ability to govern in the event of a political agreement.
 20. **The Committee should consider the question of young people and the way in which they are divided and sectarian ideas implanted. It should look at proposals to develop effective programmes to discourage religious sectarianism within and between schools.**
 21. Many of our young people are forced into gangs to survive, to be able to get to school, to have areas where they are safe. Ideas, loyalties and prejudices, that are easily developed in young, vulnerable, and impressionable people, are hard to dislodge in later life.
 22. In our opinion there needs to be a frank acknowledgement of the problems and considerable investment in this area if we are to build a new integrated society.
 23. **We propose that the Committee concentrates on the question of who should determine the future of Northern Ireland.**
 24. The best method would be to request papers on the question by a particular date. Full meetings of the Committee should concentrate on debating the issues.
 25. The other issues that we propose for consideration could be allocated to smaller, representative sub-committees to prepare initial reports.