

NORTHERN IRELAND WOMEN'S COALITION

LIAISON SUB-COMMITTEE ON CONFIDENCE-BUILDING MEASURES (CBM)

Remit Of Liaison Sub-Committee on Confidence-Building Measures

The N. Ireland Women's Coalition supports a ruling which clarifies that any issues arising in the community (outside the Talks and Forum) can be raised in the confidence-building sub-committee. The Liaison Sub-Committee has a responsibility for building confidence in the political process as well as building trust and confidence between parties.

Rule 17 of the Rules of Procedure for the Talks states: "each participant will be able to raise any significant issue of concern to them.....without their ability to do so being subject to the veto of any other party in the negotiations." This rule allows for the possibility that issues of interest to the wider community may be brought into the talks process, including issues which are not clearly defined as coming under the three Strands structure. This suggests the benefits to the process of the sub-committees, with the remit of either addressing issues which may negatively effect the overall talks process, or to act as 'gatekeeper' to feed issues into the three strands.

Rule 18, in stating: "any participant in the format in question will be free to raise any aspect of the three relationships, including constitutional issues and *any other matters which it considers relevant*", opens the door to the possibility that the talks process can react to crises or problems situated in the community which may or may not be clearly related to the process (and the structure of the process) but which nevertheless have the ability to destabilise the process. Reference to the various formats being employed by this process also highlights the potential usefulness of the Liaison Sub-committee on CBMs in acting not only, potentially, as gate-keeper but also in facilitating the un-blocking of the main Strands negotiations by bringing tangential issues into the CBM sub-committee, at least for preliminary examination.

This would also appear to be at variance with item 2(c)(2) (re: Liaison Sub-Committee on Confidence Building Measures) of the procedural motion which

1. by referring to "all aspects of the Report of the International Body relating to further confidence building measures" restricts the potential remit of the Sub-committee, leading to the situation where events outside the talks, but with the potential to destabilise them, cannot be addressed by the process except to have the effect of blocking progress in the main talks process or

2. by requiring reference down by the plenary, now agreed to meet every three months, an unacceptable delay is created in addressing situations which may have the potential to destabilise the process.

Programme of Work

Given the disparity between these two positions we believe that the pattern established by rules 17 and 18 offers the way forward. It is irrational to argue that the CBM sub-committee only becomes involved in situations, problems or crises that are specified in the International Body's Report. This document was primarily a report about the decommissioning of illegal weapons. Its remit was restricted, but in a section entitled "Other Confidence Building Measures" it mentioned other aspects of confidence-building which had been raised in discussions with groups who had been primarily interested in decommissioning.

The Women's Coalition is also keen that the process contained within the circulation of preparatory papers and the development of a programme of work for the Liaison Sub-Committee should not be seen as the end of the process, so that further considerations would not be excluded.

The distinction must be clear however, between the work of the Liaison Sub-Committee on CBM and the negotiations within the Three Strands process. The proper place for negotiations on substantive issues, for example on policing/justice issues is in the three Strands. However, a role may be played by the sub-committee in feeding issues of concern into the process (including, perhaps, the preparation of outline debates and information-based briefings)

Underlying Principles

The work of the Women's Coalition is informed by reference to our founding principles, which are:

- Equality
- Human Rights
- Inclusiveness

We believe that any development of confidence-building measures should be sited within these principles.

Shared Mission Statement

It is in the interests of all of the participants and a responsibility owed to all the people in Northern Ireland that those engaged in this process begin to offer constructive, positive leadership not only to their own electorate but with a wider view of the community at large. The Women's Coalition would be interested in seeing the development of a shared statement setting out their commitment and pledge to the wider community. We would want to see participants coming to the table and staying at the table. The constant threat to leave, to walk out, to turn one's back on the process or to bring us all to the edge of a precipice, is a form of intimidation and we must move away from this behaviour.

A shared mission statement from all participants agreeing that we are committed to continuing to talk until an acceptable accommodation is reached would reduce fear and instil confidence within all communities in N. Ireland.

Production of this shared statement could also help develop trust within the members of the Liaison Sub-Committee and beyond.

Community Confidence

In building confidence in the political process and particularly in the current negotiations the role of the sub-committee in informed and constructive debate might be enhanced by hearing directly from groups not involved in the process. This is not to suggest that the sub-committee be turned into a tribunal, but to broaden the input of communities and create a positive relationship with the Talks process.

e.g.. on the issue of prisoners we could hear from:

- ex-loyalist prisoners
- ex-republican prisoners
- prisoners wives/families
- prisoner welfare organisations eg NIACRO

PAFT Guidelines

Confidence Building measures must be spread equitably throughout the community. At the same time, we are aware that when single issues are considered within the context of confidence-building, the likelihood is that they will have more relevance for one group or another. There is therefore a need for the wider community to become more aware of the work of the Sub-Committee so that individual 'developments' are not seen on a tit for tat basis, but rather, are

seen in the broader context. Consideration needs to be given to the issue of equality-proofing the measures which we concentrate on, both in terms of individual measures and also from a wider perspective. Within this, measures should be looked at for their impact on disadvantaged groups, including women and ethnic minorities. Essentially they should be measured against the Government's PAFT (Policy Appraisal and Fair Treatment) guidelines.

Possible Agenda of Issues

The Sub Committee on confidence building will address non substantive issues and matters causing on-going tension and difficulty. Such matters are likely to fall within these broad headings.

- the criminal justice system
- policing and security arrangements in a divided community
- politically-motivated prisoners
- support for victims (including ex-prisoners) for example, counselling/intense support and rehabilitation. As an example, the Women's Coalition has already begun discussions with a bereavement counsellor examining the ways in which bereavement has affected the entire community
- issues relating to equality and mutual respect
- support for positive reconciliation between communities

Bread and Butter Issues

- Social and economic issues are crucial to our future and cannot be allowed to fall off the agenda. In the broader sense, confidence-building is wedded to these:
 - full employment (tackling unemployment)
 - the root causes of poverty (benefit systems/poverty traps)
 - urban and rural regeneration 'owned' by local people
- Support for vulnerable groups by highlighting the contribution these groups have made and could make if given space, within the context of the need for increased democratic participation:
 - ethnic minorities
 - women
 - disabled
 - lone parents
 - unemployed

Creation of a Peaceful Society

Finally, after the ceasefires 'ordinary' crime increased, for example violence towards women and ethnic minorities.

We need to retrain our youth and our communities to develop a non-violent society. This will not happen overnight, nor it will happen without hard work and effort.

As Hermann Rohrs has said, *"Peace cannot be achieved by merely preventing violent conflict. It must be anchored in attitudes and recognised as being the state in which human beings can best develop."*

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