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SUMMARY RECORD OF LIAISON SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING ON CONFIDENCE BUILDING MEASURES ON TUESDAY 18 NOVEMBER 1997 (1607)

CHAIRMEN: Senator Mitchell
Mr Holkeri

THOSE PRESENT: British Government
Irish Government

Alliance

Labour

Northern Ireland Women's Coalition

Progressive Unionist Party

Sinn Féin

Social Democratic and Labour Party

Ulster Democratic Party

Ulster Unionist Party

1. The Chairman convened the meeting at 1607 and stated that this was the second meeting of the Liaison Sub Committee. The Chairman reminded participants that he had been asked to make a ruling on a procedural issue regarding the subject matter to be discussed by the Sub Committee. Before moving to this, the Chairman said he wished to suggest a course of action for the meeting. He proposed a tour de table with participants having an opportunity to speak on those sections of their submissions not related to the procedural ruling to enable them to set out the issues which they wished to

see addressed. Following this, the Chairman said a general discussion could take place on any issue related to confidence building but, in particular, views on developing the most appropriate structure for taking forward those issues would be welcome.

2. The Chairman then moved to outline his procedural ruling. He stated that he had been asked to rule on the following issue. The Procedural Motion adopted by the Plenary on 24 September created the Sub Committee and defined its remit as the confidence building measures mentioned in the Report of the International Body and any other which might be referred by agreement of the Plenary. Rule 17 of the Rules of Procedure provided that "each participant will be able to raise any significant issues of concern and receive a fair hearing for those concerns without their ability to do so being subject to the veto of any other party to the negotiations".

3. The Chairman said the question was did Rule 17 override the Procedural Motion on the subject matter to be considered by the Sub Committee? Put another way, could any participant in the Sub Committee raise any matter relating to confidence building, whether or not it was mentioned in the Report of the International Body? The Chairman said he had reviewed the Procedural Motion and the Rule and had carefully considered the written submissions of the participants on the question. He said he believed the conflict between both to be more apparent than real.

Both were necessary to an orderly and fair consideration of the important subject of confidence building measures.

4. The Chairman added that as a matter of common sense, Rule 17 could not be literally read to permit any participant to raise any issue at any time in any format. That could lead to hopeless confusion and time-consuming repetition; it could render meaningless any effort to create strands, sub committees or other sub groups, and to assign work on the basis of those sub groupings. The Chairman said what Rule 17 plainly was intended to prevent was a participant being precluded entirely, in any format, from raising an issue of importance to it; the Rule just as plainly did not authorise the same subject to be raised whenever and wherever a participant chose. The Chairman said he therefore concluded that the subject matter of the Sub Committee was that described in the Procedural Motion.

5. The Chairman stated that at the same time, both himself, Prime Minister Holkeri and General de Chastelain were the authors of the Report of the International Body and were well aware that it was not, and was not intended to be, an exhaustive and final statement on confidence building measures. That had not been the remit of the International Body. The Chairman drew the meetings attention to para 51 of the Report of the International Body where it had stated under Section 7 - Confidence Building Measures - that "we believe it appropriate to comment on some (confidence building measures) since success in the peace process cannot be

achieved solely by reference to the decommissioning of arms". The Chairman said that that Report was completed some 22 months ago but the process had to be sufficiently reasonable and flexible to accommodate changing circumstances should that be necessary to advance the prospect of achieving agreement. The Chairman, in conclusion, said that while he would not accept attempts at unreasonable delay or repetition, he would make every effort to permit fair discussion of serious, important issues, particularly if there was no other opportunity in the process for their consideration.

6. The UUP sought clarification on the Chairman's ruling. The party said the Chairman's response was somewhat in line with the British Government's analysis contained in paras 2 and 3 of its submission. The UUP asked whether the Chairman's ruling extended to paragraph 5 of the British Government's submission. In other words the party asked whether an issue, if deemed relevant but not already on the list of subjects to be discussed, could bypass consideration by the Plenary and be included for discussion under the Chairman's discretion. The Chairman said he was unclear as to the rationale for the UUP question since he had not read paragraph 5. The UUP again asked whether the British Government's interpretation in paragraph 5 of its paper was the same as the Chairman's?

7. The Chairman said he would have to consider this question separately. What he had tried to articulate was that on the specific question of Rule 17

overriding the Procedural Motion, the answer was no. However there was room for common sense and reasonable judgement to be deployed in considering what was relevant. He said he would have to re-read paragraph 5 of the British Government's submission before giving a response to the UUP and would respond directly to the party when he had done this. The Chairman said he now invited participants to express their views on the issues which each wished to see addressed, including any comments on the papers submitted.

8. The British Government said it was happy to abide by the Chairman's ruling and happy to provide any further clarification of its paragraph 5 if this was needed. It then referred to its submission stating that that document set out its belief that the building of confidence could be a key element in the dynamic of progress in the negotiations. Although, as others had said in their submissions, the Sub Committee was not a forum for discussing the wider constitutional and systemic issues, which were being addressed elsewhere, it did have an essential role in addressing fears and concerns on associated matters which, if neglected, could impede successful progress towards a lasting agreement.

9. The British Government said it was in a distinctive position in the Sub Committee, in that it had overall responsibility for many of the issues which were likely to be discussed. The Secretary of State was wholly committed to actions and policies in Northern Ireland which maintained the rule of law

and sought to ensure equality of opportunity and equity of treatment for everyone. It was therefore ready to discuss any confidence-related concerns arising from the issues within its control, and would be happy at the appropriate time to consider tabling papers on such concerns - provided they could be clearly defined - as the basis for further discussion.

10. The British Government referred to the SDLP submission and said that that paper had pointed out that the Sub Committee was not a negotiating forum, and could not direct or determine initiatives or outcomes in these areas. The British Government said it agreed with that; it had to retain overall control of the issues for which it was responsible. But the Secretary of State and her officials would listen very readily to all representations which could help to build confidence in its policies. It therefore looked forward to participating in discussions marked by a spirit of flexibility, openness and reciprocity.

11. The British Government said its paper also mentioned that it wished to discuss confidence building measures in the International Body's Report which fell within others' control. These included a range of paramilitary activities, where it urged the relevant parties to use their influence to press forward on all these matters. It said it particularly wished to highlight, in this area, the need for information to be given to the families and relatives of those who were presumed to have been murdered by terrorists, but whose bodies had never been recovered. The British Government said it believed

action in this area would be widely welcomed throughout the community. It also believed that it was important that those who might have been coerced into leaving homes, for example in Fermanagh, should be free to return without threat to their personal safety. Summing up the British Government said it looked forward to discussing confidence issues in conformity with whatever arrangements for the handling of the Sub Committee's business were agreed.

12. The Irish Government said the Chairman's ruling made good sense and it welcomed it wholeheartedly. The Irish Government said confidence building was central to its approach to Northern Ireland issues. Primarily through its bilateral arrangements with the British Government, it had sought to advance and encourage confidence in a range of issues which had formed a core part of the problems facing Northern Ireland, including the protection of human rights, the prevention of discrimination, the fair expression of cultural identity, the promotion and status of the Irish language and the role of the security forces and the administration of justice, including in relation to prisoners.

13. The Irish Government said it approached these issues with an eye to the merits inherent in each, though coming from a nationalist perspective, it had always sought to be fair and even-handed. Moreover its commitment to the confidence agenda over the years was not simply an end in itself. Underlying it was a concern to give the nationalist community a sense that it

had a voice at government level, and that matters of concern to it could be addressed meaningfully and effectively. The Irish Government said it did not see confidence building measures as a zero-sum game. To seek likewise to cater fully for the nationalist sense of identity was of critical importance, and one which if responded to, would help remove a major source of frustration without injury to other expressions of cultural identity. Establishing and implementing parity of esteem on cultural matters was a vital challenge for everyone.

14. The Irish Government said that to seek confidence in the administration of justice and to protect human rights was surely the responsibility of everyone. No government could or should allow major lapses to persist in any of these vital areas. If they did, it was a primary responsibility of government to ensure that any such lapses were dealt with and seen to be dealt with. The Irish Government said it fully shared the view of the SDLP that confidence building measures could not be reduced to tests and rewards. Or as the PUP had submitted "confidence building is an unsolicited indication of genuine goodwill". The Irish Government fully agreed with this perspective. Advances in confidence issues would each in their way add to the overall goodwill that had to ultimately underpin the work of the talks process.

15. The Irish Government said the PUP had also touched on an important dimension to the work of the Sub Committee when it had stated that "There

is a requirement for all to create a feeling of ownership within the wider community for this process, and to ensure that any measures of confidence gained by the participants here is disseminated to our respective communities". The Irish Government said that achieving that sense of ownership and confidence would not come easily or quickly. The Sub Committee, however, could make a significant contribution towards that sense of ownership and relevance. Peace was on the ground and everyone with responsibility had a duty to respond positively and imaginatively to that development. The Irish Government said it couldn't over-emphasise the importance of this.

16. Alliance endorsed the Chairman's ruling and also endorsed what had been said in terms of the role of the Sub Committee ie that it was constituted to discuss and air issues but had no role in negotiating or reaching agreement on those issues. The party said, however, that if consensus was reached on an issue, it hope this would weigh heavily on those who had the decision making powers. Alliance said it had attempted, in its submission, to address what confidence building measures meant. It recalled that the PUP had described confidence building in terms of it not being about giving and receiving of concessions. Although some parties appeared to think that confidence building measures meant them getting concessions, rewards or encouragement this was not how it appeared to Alliance. Rewards for staying in the process, for example, would only be confidence-diminishing.

17. Alliance said it had looked at confidence building measures on two levels. The first of these was between participants in the talks. At that level confidence building measures provided reassurances to some participants of the good intentions of others. Actions which were consistent with a desire to reach an agreement and which showed a willingness to prepare for a shared and peaceful society afterwards were confidence building and furthered the overall process. Actions and comments which displayed a reluctance to give up the failed methods and mentalities of the past were not confidence building and made it more difficult for others to move or make concessions in the talks. Alliance said it was important that everyone was seen to be making a real effort to respond to the concerns of others and seen to be seeking to solve problems - especially those problems which they were particularly able to solve.

18. Alliance said the second level for confidence building was in the wider community. The party said deep distrust existed between different sections of the community and deep scepticism about the willingness and ability of some or all present to reach agreement was widespread. It was important for the success of the talks that the public was given confidence that the war was over, and that political leaders were seriously pursuing a lasting agreement. Alliance said there was an obligation on everyone to build such confidence if the process was serious about reaching agreement and building a new future.

19. Alliance said the setting of an agenda for the Sub Committee should be straightforward. The party said there was clearly a vast range of issues. The items mentioned in the first meeting could keep the Sub Committee in business for some time since the final resolution of many of these would be the task of the new institutions emerging from the talks. Given that, Alliance said it saw itself pointing to the items referred to in the International Body's Report as providing the basis for the agenda for the time being. The party said these fell into three categories:- the activities of paramilitary groups (including concerns about targeting, beatings, exclusions and information about the missing); prisoners and policing (including issues such as the forthcoming Police Bill and new legislation on parades). Alliance said it wished to conclude its opening comments by referring to its submission which alluded to the process being concerned with building a fresh start for Northern Ireland through solving problems, creating solutions, ending divisions and removing the roots of the present difficulties.

20. Labour endorsed the Chairman's ruling. The party said there were broad confidence building problems affecting everyone. To this end a precise agenda was unimportant since there would be limited time for the Sub Committee to discuss these in any detail. The party said it was important to tackle issues which people were happy with and proceed with these. Labour said it believed the Sub Committee should be more flexible in its approach and there also needed to be much clearer way of convening

meetings. The party said meeting every three or four weeks was inadequate. A different mechanism was required.

21. Labour added that the fundamental political and ideological stumbling block in the process was who had the right to decide the political future of Northern Ireland? Issues such as the nature of a Northern Ireland Assembly or what was the principle of authority for all Ireland bodies had to be resolved, or a compromise reached, if progress was going to be made in the process. The party proposed that the self determination issue be discussed by the Sub Committee on the basis of humanity and the logic of how society had got to that point. The Sub Committee should be looking at the rights and wrongs of such issues, challenging the dogmas which existed, defining the arguments, the facts and the reasoning. All this would be a contribution to confidence building if these were documented and taken out for a period of wider consultation and discussion.

22. The party added that it believed the Sub Committee should have a mediating role when controversial problems were encountered both inside and outside the talks. This could be taken forward on an informal basis which might also assist in building confidence and in trying to point the way towards agreement between the parties on how such issues should be handled.

23. The NIWC endorsed the Chairman's ruling. Referring to previous comments, the party said that the broad issues belonged to the strands, but particular issues could be addressed by the Sub Committee. The party said that fundamental problems shouldn't be allowed to destabilise the process. The NIWC said there was a need, as the PUP had indicated, to respect diversity and to ensure that confidence building measures were not dished out on a tit for tat basis, but were viewed in the broader context. The party said it saw the Sub Committee's modus operandi as the generation of goodwill within the overall process where some participants could raise priority issues early on and others could do likewise later. The party said its submission had referred to the equitable spread of confidence building measures throughout the community but it also accepted that particular issues could be brought to the Sub Committee by particular parties at any time.

24. The PUP said it had no difficulties with the Chairman's ruling. The party said confidence building was a wide area and therefore anything could be placed on the agenda thus raising the potential for the Sub Committee to become a talking shop. The PUP asked what would the parties be doing with information brought to the Sub Committee? How would such issues be addressed in terms of the various constituencies represented around the table? For example certain parties were seeking meetings with Prime Minister Blair regarding confidence building. Yet if any movement occurred as a result of such discussions, the more likely interpretation

placed on them would be that of a concession rather than a confidence building measure.

25. The PUP said there were other current issues to be flagged up, such as attacks on loyalist culture and symbolism. There were also issues in relation to the education of the loyalist community to respect the identity and allegiance of others. In terms of structures, the party said it had concerns about the timing of Sub Committee meetings and also the construction of agendas.

26. Sinn Féin welcomed the Chairman's ruling and specifically the Chairman's efforts to have full and frank discussion of issues. The party said that building confidence and trust was crucial in any peace process. All the participants had a responsibility in this. The Sub Committee, comprising representatives from all the participants, provided a mechanism to assist that. Sinn Féin said that while everyone had a responsibility for developing confidence building measures and it welcomed contributions from everyone, at this juncture the major responsibility rested with the British Government. They were the de facto sovereign authority with the day to day responsibility for overcoming all the issues left by previous British Governments. The British Government was also a participant.

27. Sinn Féin said everyone shared the view that issues of equality and justice were basic civil and human rights. But these were not matters for

negotiation. These were the responsibility of the British Government. The party added that the discussion of confidence building measures, whether in Sub Committee or in the strands, in no way overrode, delayed or could be a substitute for British Government responsibility for speedily tackling the agenda for change which was really vital to the building of confidence. In many cases such action might merely require the implementation of existing British Government policy. In other cases it would require going far beyond this in terms of policy, legislation and other measures.

28. Sinn Féin said parallel to and separate from the ongoing responsibility of the British Government as the de facto power, there was a responsibility placed on all participants to ensure that a meaningful and inclusive process of negotiations was taking place and to assist in the creation of an atmosphere of confidence and trust. This could only be facilitated by participants exploring issues which were of concern to all. The party said the role of the Sub Committee was in relation to specific issues which might contribute to the building of confidence in the process as a whole. It noted that the International Body had made some suggestions in this regard but it agreed with the PUP and the Irish Government that everyone had to create ownership of the process and that there was no room for point scoring. Sinn Féin said the Sub Committee had to facilitate discussions in the strands if there was a desire to bring an end to the conflict.

29. Given this, Sinn Féin added that issues which it believed required discussion in the Sub Committee were the continuing deployment of the military and the reinforcement of security bases and related issues; the imprisonment of Roisin McAliskey and Colin Duffy who continued to suffer harassment at the hands of the RUC; political prisoners, some of whom had now spent 22 years inside and emergency legislation. Sinn Féin said these were the issues which were causing unease in the community and, if discussed by the Sub Committee, could contribute to the building of confidence.

30. The SDLP welcomed the Chairman's ruling. In terms of the work of the Sub Committee, the party said it would seek requests for confidence building measures which pervaded beyond the Sub Committee and the talks process. The SDLP said confidence growth had to be generated among and across all participants. It couldn't simply be a matter of participants making their respective demands or bids to governments for concessions. If confidence building was reduced to tests and rewards, or calculated in this way, it would not effect the political goodwill and trust that it was supposed to achieve. The party said even if governments moved on issues today, there were still confidence building measures which needed resolution such as the ending of the conflict itself. There was therefore a deeper and different level of confidence building attached to the actual negotiating process.

31. The SDLP said everyone had a responsibility to build confidence in the wider process and ensure that progress was made on those confidence building issues handled by the Sub Committee. If the Committee's work was to be positive everyone needed to resolve that it was not a wailing wall for everything. Such a development would only end with cynicism developing between participants, thus defeating the Committee's objective. The party said it might be helpful, in the spirit of the Procedural Motion, if at future meetings, participants could table papers related to their areas of responsibility which detailed what was or was not currently happening. It had to be remembered, however, that the Sub Committee must try to avoid becoming immersed in an inflationary round of raising issues. This would be self defeating.

32. The SDLP said, on the other hand, that it was equally important that people were not frustrated in the Sub Committee. People couldn't feel that they were unable to raise issues of concern in their own community. The party said it had noted from other submissions that while there was a consensus that the Sub Committee could not negotiate these issues, neither could it be the subject of the sufficient consensus rule or "nothing is agreed until everything is agreed". The SDLP said it was better to allow such issues to stand on their own rather than being part of another negotiating process.

33. The UDP welcomed the Chairman's ruling. It said while it wouldn't go into the detail of some of its issues, the matter of loyalist prisoners

remained uppermost in its mind. Three years had gone by since the establishment of the loyalist cease-fire and some prisoners had played a vital role in securing and maintaining it, yet there had been no confidence building measures for them. The UDP said it was important for the community on the ground to see a real benefit from the process such as equality of opportunity and economic development in heretofore deprived loyalist areas. The UDP said it also welcomed the Irish Government's comments on approaching the confidence building issue from a nationalist perspective, acting as a guarantor for the nationalist community. The party said it felt the British Government should play a similar role for the unionist community. The party said it agreed with the concerns of the PUP that the Sub Committee avoid becoming a talking shop or a safety valve for those in other negotiations. The party said it was also concerned that there appeared to be a direct linkage between this Sub Committee and the Decommissioning version since there seemed a reluctance to call a meeting of the former unless there was a meeting of the latter taking place as well. The UDP said it hoped there was no direct linkage being made between issues of a confidence building nature and decommissioning.

34. The UUP outlined the items it had submitted for deliberation by the Sub-committee. Referring to its third item, it noted that the two Governments had substituted 'disarmament' of paramilitary organisations for the formula 'permanent cessation of violence' that had been contained in the Downing Street Declaration. The Decommissioning would demonstrate

good will. It said the references in its second item to the Nolan Review were self-evident.

35. Referring to its first item, the UUP noted that the report of the International Body had included social and economic development as a confidence building measure. It said that political stability was a prerequisite for economic development and international investment. It observed that acceptance of the territorial integrity of the state was a prerequisite for both EU and NATO enlargement. It was in this context that the UUP wished to include Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution. All international bodies accepted the territorial integrity of the United Kingdom. It said it had included the phrase 'in word and deed' because it regarded the constitutional claim as illegal, and a cause of instability. It stressed that it was not saying this in an aggressive or strident manner.

36. The Chairman referred to the confidence building measures outlined in the Report of the International Body which the Procedural Motion established as the subject matter of the sub-committee. Citing paragraph (2) of the Procedural Motion, he said the committee will be expected to 'consider developments in relation to such measures; consider such reports on such measures as may be submitted by those with responsibility for the issue in question; and draw to the attention of the chairman of the relevant strand any institutional or systematic implications which may arise from its consideration of particular confidence building measures.' He noted that the

UUP suggestion of economic and social development was also included. He circulated to the participants a list identifying five issues for deliberation by the sub-committee, along with sub-headings, and invited the participants to consider them. He stated that the order of each item, taken from the report of the International Body, was arbitrary. The Chairman asked whether participants wished meetings to be devoted to a specific topic, and in which order. He agreed with the UDP that there should be no connection between meetings of this sub-committee and those of the sub-committee on decommissioning. He proposed that the next meeting occur during the period 1-3 December.

37. The British Government said this was a sensible proposal, but asked whether, given its size, the economic and social development heading might be sub-divided. Sinn Féin welcomed the proposed agenda, but inquired whether equality should feature as a separate heading. The British Government said that equality issues would fall under economic and social development. The NIWC also welcomed the draft agenda, and proposed that the committee take prisoners' issues as its first topic. The UUP said it would be easier to agree five agenda items, rather than decide sub-headings for each one. It wondered whether disarmament might not feature under the paramilitaries topic. It stressed that agreeing a topic for discussion did not mean a party necessarily agreed with the topic. The Chairman agreed with this latter point, and suggested they delete the sub-headings which had been included for illustrative purposes only.

38. Labour said it had hoped the sub-committee would be different to the strands, with a format that would allow some agreement to emerge. It proposed that working groups consisting of a number of interested parties be established to deal with, and report on, individual topics. In this way they might be able to reach a consensus. It also hoped the sub-committee would be able to respond to issues as they arose, and be able to meet at short notice. The Chairman said that meetings would be called by the chair if a crisis emerged and there was sufficient indication from participants that one was needed.

39. The Irish Government supported the NIWC proposal that prisoners' issues be dealt with first which, it said, touched both communities. It said the list of items was in no particular order, but was reluctant to place paramilitary issues first, noting that a separate sub-committee existed to deal with paramilitary arms. It agreed that equality issues would fall under economic and social development. Sinn Féin also supported the NIWC proposal. It asked if the next meeting would be in early December, and proposed that the sub-committee meet on a fortnightly basis. It asked how the two Governments would respond if the sub-committee were to reach a real consensus on any of the issues.

40. The British Government said it had overall responsibility in Northern Ireland, and had a responsibility to govern. It said it had some difficulty

with the suggestion that the sub-committee must reach a consensus, noting Alliance's comments about the liberating effect of not having to reach agreement on any one given issue, fearing that exchanges would become adversarial if they were. It said it was happy to take prisoners' issues first, and suggested participants table papers to help focus the discussion.

41. The Irish Government reiterated its belief that it was vital to the success of the peace process that people outside the talks experience the benefits of peace. It said Sinn Féin would be aware of the release of two groups of prisoners from Irish gaols. It noted the importance of prisoners' issues, and said it was happy to support the NIWC proposal. The Irish Government said it would attach great importance to any recommendations from the sub-committee, which would be looked upon sympathetically.

42. Alliance said it was happy with the topic headings, and had no difficulty in taking prisoners' issues first. It recalled that Sinn Féin had raised in the Strands the purported involvement of loyalist paramilitaries in drugs trafficking. It suggested that there be no obligation on participants to prepare papers. It proposed that they complete the agenda without having to complete each item to everyone's satisfaction.

43. The SDLP said it was happy with the headings, and with the order suggested by the NIWC. It said it was anxious not to get into a rut. It hoped that the sub-committee would only discuss issues as they arose on the

agenda, though it said the two Governments should be free to report developments without awaiting the next scheduled meeting for any given topic. It said confidence building measures should not be awarded as an inducement for political progress, and should be announced to all rather than at bilateral meetings. In this manner they would avoid an inflationary demand for concessions as they were granted to other participants. Equally so, it hoped they could avoid a series of 'punishment meetings' where parties presented demands for action on areas of interest to them.

44. Sinn Féin said it would welcome a British Government paper on prisoners' issues. It said it was extraordinary that the British Government felt there was no need for consensus in the sub-committee's deliberations, rejecting the implication that it was a talking shop. It said that, if consensus were reached, there would be a greater onus on the relevant government to take action. It asked the British Government whether it would implement any recommendations from the committee. The Chairman read from the Procedural Motion, and said that, at the very minimum, the sub-committee would be expected to draw its conclusions to the attention of the relevant strand chairman, though this did not preclude any other steps being taken.

45. The UUP suggested that paramilitary organisations be taken as issue number two, followed by economic and social development. The Chairman said that this would leave security and policing issues to follow after. The PUP said that economic and social development should be taken second as it

affected more people. Alliance said that the order was a matter for the chair, and suggested that he take soundings from the participants. The NIWC supported this proposal. Labour reiterated its belief that the structure of the committee needed to be such as to allow agreement, and returned to its suggestion for sub-committees. Alliance said most participants would have difficulty agreeing to an issue being determined by others in their stead. It said it would object to the issue of paramilitary organisations being dealt with lower than second place, citing the number of recent murders and media reports of threats from paramilitaries.

46. The PUP said it was opposed to sub-groups, and said prisoners' issues affected the whole community. It said economic development had an impact on paramilitary activity so it should be dealt with by the sub-committee first. The SDLP said it did not mind in which order the issues were taken as long as it could be sure that they would be dealt with in a matter of weeks. It said sequencing would only be an issue if there were to be long intervals between meetings. It said participants could raise issues under different headings, and advised against drawing up a priority list of topics. This would lead to competitive demands for concessions and support the notion that different confidence building measures were of particular concern to individual parties.

47. The UUP said it empathised with Alliance's comments about paramilitary activities, and noted the PUP's comments about the links

between economic and social development and paramilitary activity. It said that the saving of one life was more important than economic issues, but said it would accept a ruling from the chair. As the SDLP had said, they were all important issues. The NIWC said it appreciated the intention behind Labour's suggestion of sub-groups but felt it would not be a good idea. It said all subjects were inter-connected. It said progress could be achieved if meetings were held on a fortnightly basis. The British Government assured Sinn Féin it attached great importance to the deliberations of the committee, and would take into account its recommendations. It said a process directed at seeking sufficient consensus was more suited to negotiations. It said they needed a constructive approach based on flexibility, openness and reciprocity. The British Government doubted that sub-groups would be helpful at this point, and referred the question of sequence to the chair, remarking that all the issues were important.

48. The Chairman proposed that the next meeting take place in two weeks' time during the review plenary week, at a time to be set by the chair following consultation with the participants and the Business Committee. He said the subject would be prisoners' issues. The same format would apply to future meetings unless specific notice was given to the contrary. He would delete reference to the subheadings, and the order would be as follows: 1) prisoners issues; 2) economic and social development; 3) paramilitary organisations; 4) security issues; 5) policing issues.

49. The UDP asked whether meetings could take place earlier in the day. The Chairman said the meeting had been scheduled for 1600 to allow bilateral consultations to take place. Depending on the schedule, he would try to accommodate participants' wishes, and asked whether a meeting as early as 0930 or 1000 would be acceptable. The UDP said an hour earlier would be an improvement, a view supported by Alliance and the PUP. The British Government thanked the Chairman for the agenda ruling and said it would be helpful if there was an informal mechanism to indicate issues which participants wished to raise under each agenda item. The Chairman said this was a good point, and suggested it be discussed at the next meeting. Prime Minister Holkeri suggested parties submit papers on agenda item (1) by Friday 28 November. The Chairman then adjourned the meeting at 1755.

Independent Chairmen Notetakers
24 November 1997