

Office of the Independent Chairmen

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SUMMARY RECORD OF REVIEW PLENARY SESSION - TUESDAY 2 DECEMBER 1997 (1330)

Those present:

INDEPENDENT CHAIRMEN	GOVERNMENT TEAMS	PARTIES
Senator Mitchell	British Government	Alliance
Mr Holkeri	Irish Government	Labour
General de Chastelain		Northern Ireland Women's Coalition
		Progressive Unionist Party
		Sinn Féin
		Social Democratic & Labour Party
		Ulster Democratic Party
		Ulster Unionist Party

1. The Chairman convened the meeting at 1340 and stated that this was a meeting of the full Review Plenary in accordance with paragraph 5 of the Procedural Motion dated 24 September.

2. The Chairman said the first item of business was whether the participants wished to have reports made to the meeting from the Chairmen of the Strands and both Sub-committees. He suggested to participants that, as an alternative to this, he would ask each Chairman to produce a written report reviewing progress in their relevant area and circulate this to the participants. The Chairman asked whether participants had any objection to this suggestion. Hearing none, the Chairman said that written reports would

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be produced as soon as was practical, compiled by his staff and circulated accordingly.

3. The Chairman said he now wished to proceed to a general discussion and suggested that a tour de table occur without interruption in the first round. When this was complete, an open discussion would take place if this was required. Following the conclusion of this, the Chairman said he wished to put forward a suggestion for moving the process forward. The Chairman then asked the British Government to open the tour de table.

4. The British Government said that participants would soon receive written reports from it as the Chairman of Strand One and from both it and the Irish Government as the co-chairmen of Strand Three. The British Government said it believed, from its experience of bilaterals in Strand One, that a lot of good work had been done in last few weeks. The period prior to that had not been wasted either since some useful exchanges had occurred. Nevertheless, the British Government said it believed the time was now opportune to introduce a change in format and go forward and begin to look at the areas from which agreement might be reached as to the key issues and how these could be resolved.

5. The Irish Government said this was the first Review Plenary and it offered the opportunity to stand back and

look at events since the Procedural Motion was adopted on 24 September. More importantly the session also gave everyone the chance to plan a future course of activity. The Irish Government referred to the Chairman's earlier meeting that day as productive and said it wished to pay tribute to the International Independent Commission on Decommissioning for its recent Initial Report. It said it looked forward to receiving further reports in due course. The Irish Government said it also looked forward to continuing the ongoing work of the Sub-committee on Confidence Building Measures where participants had already set out their ideas on the basic issues and some agenda surfing had taken place. Beyond all of this, however, there was the need to move forward and secure some common ground.

6. The Irish Government said it thought that there was widespread agreement around on what that common ground could be and it believed that a small committee of the Plenary should be formed to identify the key issues and agree these. The Irish Government said it was pleased that such a group would be meeting and hoped that it might be able to reach agreement ahead of the given deadline (15 December). In conclusion, the Irish Government said it looked forward to continuing to work with the participants within the different formats and in different locations such as London and Dublin (the proposed dates for the latter would be releasing shortly) as well as completing the work of the Review Plenary.

7. Alliance said the period since the end of September had been frustrating. Such frustrations had arisen as a result of the slow pace, relationships with one another, some things said or unsaid and released outside or inside the conference room. The party said it would be easy to focus on all of this but that would be counterproductive. Alliance said it was unsurprising that a certain degree of shadow boxing had occurred since the summer, but, it welcomed some developments during that period.

8. Alliance said the recent bilaterals had been constructive and it particularly welcomed the meeting between the UUP leader and the Taoiseach. The party said it viewed this interaction as particularly significant and the remainder of participants had to play their part in supporting this. Alliance said it welcomed the Chairman's earlier meeting and its objective of attempting to reach agreement on the key issues. It was grateful to the Chairmen, both Governments and colleagues for the positiveness demonstrated. The party said it would give all its efforts towards building on this so that it could advise the people in the community that the process was grasping the substantive issues and moving closer to the important tasks. That was the realistic view which could be given at this stage. Now it was a matter of getting on with it over the next number of days.

9. Labour said the remit of the process was to reach agreement within the totality of relationships. The party said it regretted the continuing absence of the DUP and UKUP since the broad fact of the matter was that everyone who was part of the problem needed to be part of the solution. The party said it wished to renew its request that both parties be present. Labour said it also regretted the failure of all parties to engage with one another. It said it recognised the difficulties for the major parties in this since they were constantly looking over their shoulder at what other people might be saying about their conduct. However, the party thanked those who had met with it and as a result this had provided, through a set of wide ranging discussions, a much clearer understanding of other parties' positions.

10. Labour said the first six weeks of negotiations had been useful. The recent bilaterals had been extremely helpful and key issues had been identified. Now it was time to move on and get agreement on these since it had to be remembered that the overall agreement was to be determined by the people themselves and not by those in the talks. Those in the community were waiting to hear something positive from the process. It was time to bite the bullet and to reach agreement on principles. This was a key stage in the process. Labour said it welcomed the proposal for a smaller group to tackle this and hoped that, by 15 December, the process could provide a decent Christmas present to the

Northern Ireland people before going forward and discussing the issues in depth in the new year.

11. The NIWC agreed with the Chairman's proposals and referred to its document dated 26 November which had alluded to a similar proposal to establish smaller groups to tackle the key issues. This was why it believed the Chairman's proposal should be supported. The party said it was pleased with the Chairman's meeting earlier that morning and it was now a question of getting on with the substantive work. The party said it wouldn't read out the detail of its paper which had been circulated but wished it placed on the record.

12. The NIWC's paper stated that under paragraph 25 of the Rules the Chairman should establish two Sub-committees of the Plenary as follows: Sub-committee one to explore arrangements and relationships "in the round"; Sub-committee two to explore justice and rights issues "in the round". These Sub-committees should be chaired by the Plenary Chairman and his alternate. The Sub-committee should be comprised of two persons per participant with one backup person. The remit of the Sub-committees should be to explore and discuss "in the round" with no commitment being required from participants for agreement. This should not rule out the possibility for agreement, if agreement is forthcoming. The Sub-committee Chairman should take the soundings of the Sub-committee as to general agreement and

identify areas of disagreement. Areas of agreement and disagreement should be checked with each party subsequently. These Sub-committees could meet for three days in the first instance, with appropriate breaks for bilaterals if required. Subsequently the Sub-committee could meet on Monday and Tuesday mornings with the afternoon of each day devoted to meetings in Strand One and Strand Two format for more detailed discussion.

13. The PUP said Alliance had made a fair point when it had said it would be wrong to focus on frustration. The party said perhaps that particular pain level had to be gone through in any case. The PUP welcomed the change of format proposed and hoped all would come to the table with the ability and desire to work hard for a solution.

14. Sinn Féin said it wished to pay credit to the Chairman for his patience and integrity. The party said it hoped it would now be possible to move forward to meaningful peace negotiations. The party said the formation of a smaller group was a good development and now some sense of urgency was needed on how to proceed from here. Sinn Féin said the failure to move forward would have grave implications for those outside the process. It would have a demoralising effect on the community and everyone needed to be cognizant of this. Sinn Féin said people needed to see the benefits of the process; they needed to see their lives and matters on the ground improving. The party said it looked forward

to engaging with all the other parties, on the same basis as everyone else, using a flexible and dynamic approach within the new format.

15. The SDLP welcomed the developments outlined and said it was now down to everyone to concentrate on the key issues and reaching agreement on these.

16. The UDP recalled the frustration of the last few weeks and said that there seemed to be a certain amount of relief around that the process was moving on. Nevertheless it was probably wrong to become frustrated in the first place since much of this had been generated through surfing the agenda items. The UDP said it hoped the process could now move forward to identifying key areas and components for agreement and become more focused. Further comment from the party would be reserved for later. In the interim it was glad that matters were moving forward but believed everyone should keep their feet on the ground in relation to the tasks ahead.

17. The UUP thanked the Chairmen and staff for their assistance and patience in reaching this stage. The party said it would require the Chairman's good office as the process proceeded over the next few weeks. The UUP said it had hoped the twin track of political progress and decommissioning would have reached defining points but this had not occurred. With regard to decommissioning, the UUP

said it blamed both Governments for the lack of progress. It said much of the International Independent Commission's work should have been already been undertaken by both Governments some 12 months earlier.

18. The UUP said it would also be wrong to cut a stick with which to break people's backs. The party said the setting of deadlines in advance was a mistake since it merely raised the hype and if the objective wasn't reached by that time then it created a crisis point for the process. One had to be realistic in terms of so called Christmas presents to the community. The UUP said it hoped that progress could be made in the new format - a format which it had flagged up at the start of the negotiations some time ago. The party said it was right to go to the task in hand and see if it was possible to define what decisions needed to be taken and the order of these. In conclusion, the party again urged that a situation wasn't created whereby the process ended up in a crisis just because a particular deadline wasn't met. Furthermore there was no point in criticising others. Everyone could do this. It was time to get on with the business.

19. The Chairman sought further comments. There were none. He then outlined a method of proceeding over the next two weeks. He suggested that the Plenary agree to the establishment of a sub group charged with presenting an agreed statement of the key issues to be resolved and an

agreed format for resolving those issues. The sub group would comprise two members from each participating group and it was proposed to hold the first meeting tomorrow at 1030 with the intention of reporting back to the Plenary on 15 December. The Chairman asked whether there were any objections, comment or discussion on his proposal. Alliance inquired as to the sub group's Chairman. The Chairman indicated his intention to chair the meetings.

20. The Chairman asked for any other comments. Hearing none he proposed that the process proceed in that manner. He added that he anticipated that the Plenary would meet again on 15 December and tentatively suggested 1300. The Chairman also indicated his intention to make a brief press statement following the conclusion of the meeting, noting what had been said and done during the day and expressing the belief that all participants were serious in making a job of moving the process forward. The Chairman asked whether there were any objections to this. Alliance informed the chair that 15 December was the date set for the Christmas lunch. The Chairman said he would take that into account in the scheduling of the next Plenary meeting.

21. The PUP informed the Chairman that the contents of his statement had already been carried by the BBC. The Chairman thanked the party for this information and asked for any further comments. Hearing none and noting that the next Liaison Sub-committee on Confidence Building Measures was

also scheduled for 15 December, the Chairman adjourned the meeting at 1413, subject to the call of the chair.

22. A copy of the Chairman's press statement issued after the Plenary meeting is attached.

Independent Chairmen Notetakers
3 December 1997

PARTIES

Abnott
Labour
Northern Ireland Women's Coalition
Progressive Unionist Party
Sinn Féin
Social Democratic & Labour Party
Ulster Democratic Party
Ulster Unionist Party

at 1340 and stated
Review Plenary in
the Federal Motion dated

of business was
have reports made to the
Grands and both Sub-
participants that, as an
each Chairman to produce a
in their relevant area and
The Chairman asked
to this suggestion.
written reports would