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[Alternative draft: 20/6/96]

POSSIBLE STATEMENT ON THE STATUS OF THE GROUND RULES

The British Government welcomes agreement on rules of procedure for these negotiations which will constitute a single source of reference for the conduct of our proceedings.

We welcome the convergence demonstrated during discussion of the various papers tabled by delegations last Friday and, as I indicated previously, we were entirely content to withdraw the Procedural Guidelines circulated by the two Governments on 6 June and work instead on the composite draft circulated by the Independent Chairmen on 18 June.

We have now between us developed the rules of procedure to the point where all delegations are satisfied that they constitute a full, complete and self-contained statement and that the proceedings can now be taken forward on that basis. The British Government welcomes that.

For our part, we continue to regard the Ground Rules as an important part of our policy in relation to the negotiations. They also form part of the legal basis to the extent that that is necessary as a consequence of the references to the Ground Rules in the Northern Ireland (Entry to Negotiations etc) Act. Equally we continue to hold to the view which I expressed in the House of Commons

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during the debates on the Entry to Negotiations Act that the conduct of the negotiations is, as the Ground Rules themselves acknowledge, "exclusively a matter for those involved in the negotiations".

We are all now, as I understand it, ready to proceed to conduct negotiations on the basis of the Rules of Procedure now before us. That is a necessary, important and positive achievement. I acknowledge the constructive role which all delegations have played in bringing that about, and the role of Senator Mitchell in leading the discussions which have produced this result. The British Government delegation looks forward to real engagement on the substance of the important issues which now fall to be addressed.

Having nudged the Irish, the UUP and the SDLP into the zone of convergence we cleared the attached text with Irish officials (very much ad referendum to their Ministers) and Michael Ancram intends to show it to Ken Maginnis/Reg Empey tonight, to illustrate how the concept we discussed with them earlier today might work. General de Chastelain is fully briefed and supportive. Michael Ancram and Seag O hUiginn have agreed with him that the text might "emerge" on Monday as a "Chairman's" proposal in the light of reports on the round of bilaterals.

(Signed)

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