

NORTHERN IRELAND WOMEN'S COALITION

SUBMISSION ON PROCEDURAL GUIDELINES AND OPENING PLENARY AGENDA

Chairpersons

1. The Women's Coalition is happy to concur with the proposals in paragraph 2 of the Procedural Guidelines and paragraphs 4 and 12 in the Scenario in regard to independent chairpersonship
 - that Senator Mitchell will chair the Plenary Session
 - that Senator Mitchell will chair the Sub-Committee on Decommissioning
 - that General de Castelain will chair Strand Two
 - That General de Castelain will chair the Business Committee
 - that Mr Holkeri should act as alternate chair when necessary.
2. The Women's Coalition welcomes the proposal that Senator Mitchell with the assistance of General de Castelain and Mr Holkeri will assist the two Governments in giving effect to their joint commitment under paragraph 15 of the Ground Rules.
3. The Women's Coalition welcomes in paragraph 15 of the Ground Rules that the "structure and process of the negotiations will be used in the most constructive possible manner in the search for an agreement".
4. The Women's Coalition believes that rules of procedure including the power of the chair must be established in such a way as to attain the most effective structure and process.
5. Input into debate to date has suggested two extreme interpretations of the role of the chair - a functional chair for chairing meetings or a "Supremo" who will be taking decisions.
6. The Women's Coalition believes that the role of the chair should be neither of these two extremes; and that the chair should have sufficient power to be a catalyst in the process, facilitating parties to reach agreement.

7. The Women's Coalition believes it to be a considerable asset to have the assistance of a panel of chairpersons of such international standing to assist us
 - in achieving a satisfactory process
 - in listening carefully and in interacting
 - in interpreting correctly and in analysing
 - in defining and clarifying
 - in thinking creatively
 - in deducing possible outcomes
 - in coming to agreement
8. This role for the chair is supported by experience in other international and domestic conflict situations. There are many international and domestic models in which the chair or the panel have involvement which ranges through conciliation, mediation and arbitration.
9. The Women's Coalition sees the role of the chairperson as operating at two levels.
 - mediation on issues of content and substance
 - arbitration on issues of procedure.
10. The Women's Coalition believes that the combination of the role of the chair outlined in the Scenario and the rules of operation of the chair outlined in the Procedural Guidelines allows for this.

Sufficient Consent

11. The concern which the Women's Coalition has with the Procedural Guidelines is on the limited definition of sufficient consensus used in the Procedural Guidelines. The Women's Coalition understands from paragraph 21 of the Procedural Guidelines that the application of sufficient consensus will be applied in such a way as to ensure that there is majority acceptance by both of the two main traditions; and that the operation of this sufficient consensus will have regard to the political parties voting strengths according to the percentage valid poll.
12. The Women's Coalition welcomes the fact that the relatively equal size of party representation at the Talks not only establishes some equity among interests (rather than sizes of constituency) but creates the possibility of a new dynamic, a different flow and ebb to unblock barriers and achieve progress. The Women's Coalition wants to see the enlargement of the concept of sufficient consensus by the addition of a second definition - ie that sufficient consensus should also mean the necessity to secure the agreement of a set number of parties.

13. The Women's Coalition calls for sufficient consensus to be defined and applied differently at different levels of decision-making (Option 1); or for both definitions of sufficient consensus to be applied in combination at all levels (Option 2).
14. **Option 1.** In every meeting and forum except in Plenary Session, sufficient consensus should mean sufficient consensus among the parties, with the operation of a high threshold of 7 or 8 parties. At Plenary level the voting strengths of the parties should be applied as per Para 21 of the Procedural Guidelines.
15. **Option 2.** The application of sufficient consensus should mean the achievement of a combination, or double, sufficient consensus. To achieve sufficient consensus at every level and in every forum including Plenary Session a threshold of voting strength and a threshold of parties should be attained; for example a percentage of the valid poll and the agreement of 7 or 8 parties.
16. The Women's Coalition believes the benefit of this approach is that the involvement of minority parties is more meaningful, that every party must work to win consensus, that practical lessons about respecting minorities are applied and that as far as is humanly possible all parties are bound into the agreement.

Representation

17. The Women's Coalition believes every effort should be made to ensure that parties are able to be represented in Sub-groups and Committees to build a common consensus of all interests throughout the process.
18. The Women's Coalition requests that in the spirit of Para 7 of the Scenario of the Opening Plenary when it refers to "representatives of the two governments and of the political parties," a flexible interpretation of the word representative should be applied. On occasion it should mean elected representative in the case of final decision-making fora such as the Plenary Sessions. On occasion at lower level discussions it should mean representative of the party to allow the participation of party alternates with the appropriate skill and expertise.
19. The Women's Coalition believes this to be necessary to ensure full use of all parties' expertise and to secure the full involvement and binding in to consensus along the way of minor parties with less elected representatives.

Opening Plenary Agenda

20. The Women's Coalition is satisfied with the agenda set for the Opening Plenary Session and does not want any change in the order of that agenda.

14 JUNE 1996