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David

NORTHERN IRELAND FORUM: OPENING SESSION

Further to my letter of 4 June I should like to confirm that, having taken soundings with all the parties elected to the Forum, I have nominated Mr John Gorman as its interim Chairman under paragraph 1(2) of Schedule 2 of the Northern Ireland (Entry to Negotiations etc) Act 1996 ("the 1996 Act"). I have also confirmed the first meeting of the Forum for 2.00 pm on Friday 14 June, under paragraph 2(1) of that Schedule in the Interpoint Centre, York Street, Belfast.

I also thought it would be helpful now to provide some detail as to how the opening of proceedings might take place. I would emphasise right away that this is not intended in any way to dictate how the Forum should conduct its business, but an effort to facilitate matters until the elected representatives are in a position to organise their own affairs.

The details are summarised in an appendix to this letter, but briefly, I envisage proceedings at the opening session being conducted along the following lines:

- (i) the Chairman appointed by me as notified above takes the chair. It might be appropriate for him at that stage to read into the record the notification issued by me under paragraph 2(1) of Schedule 2 to the Act,



covering the first meeting, and also the text of his instrument of appointment;

- (ii) the Chairman might then conduct the election of the Chairman of the Forum as required by paragraph 1 of Schedule 2 to the Act. In the initial Rules of Procedure which I have now determined, a procedure is suggested whereby this might be done. This takes account of the requirement in paragraph 4 of Schedule 2 to the 1996 Act for a 75% majority vote; and also allows for the election of someone who is not a member of the Forum. (In this latter connection, you will note the provisions of the Rule that the person nominated for election need not actually be present, but his written consent to nomination will have to be produced should he not be there to give verbal assent). In theory at least, there is no reason why, if he/she proves acceptable to all the parties, the person nominated by me as chairman should not be eligible for election, in which case the election proceedings would be conducted by a temporary replacement;
- (iii) the Party leaders at that stage might feel it was appropriate to make a brief statement, welcoming the new incumbent to the Chair; following which the Chairman and members might sign the official Roll of Members;
- (iv) arrangements for the Forum drawing up its own Rules of Procedure might then constitute the next item of business. The initial Rules of Procedure that I have now determined make basic provision for establishing a Rules Committee. If you thought that to be an



appropriate way forward, the terms of that Rule could be translated into a motion for discussion and adoption, with the names of the members of the Committee included;

- (v) at that stage, past practice suggests that the Chairman would adjourn the Forum until such time as the Rules Committee had completed its deliberations and drawn up a report to be presented to the membership. That date could either be agreed at the time and included in the motion to establish the Rules Committee; or alternatively, the Rule for the Initial Direction of Business gives the Chairman authority to call a sitting of the Forum at an appropriate time. The Committee might be able to complete its work in around two weeks; but given the requirement for the Rules to be subsequently approved by me under the terms of paragraph 3(4) of Schedule 2 to the Act you may wish to consider if a longer period of deliberation might be appropriate.

In that connection, I might point out that the interim Rules of Procedure which I copied to you for comments on 4 June, now amended as I have thought fit in light of parties' comments, have now been notified by me as a starting point for the deliberations of the Rules Committee. I attach for information a copy of the interim rules sent today to the interim chairman.



I repeat here my earnest hope you will not regard this letter as an attempt to intrude in an area which is rightly the preserve of the elected membership of the Forum. That is very far from my intention. As I pointed out in my earlier letter, however, there is an obligation on all of us to develop the potential of the Forum for promoting dialogue, understanding and consensus across the communities of Northern Ireland; and my suggestions here represent a sincere attempt to help us jointly achieve that objective.

I shall be glad to consider any comments you may have on these proposals. Given the time constraints, the quickest way of doing this might be directly to Michael Ancram or me at the talks in Castle Buildings or direct to Nigel Carson, Forum Secretary, on Belfast 522803.

*I am sincerely,
Peter*