



# Northern Ireland Office

## Press Notice

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### NORTHERN IRELAND ARMS DECOMMISSIONING BILL

A new Bill designed to make provision connected with Northern Ireland about the decommissioning of firearms, ammunition and explosives was given its first reading in the Commons today.

The Bill which would enable the Government to give effect to the Report of the International Body on decommissioning was introduced by Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Sir Patrick Mayhew QC, MP.

The main provisions of the Bill are:

- . to make provision in respect of decommissioning schemes to apply to arms in Northern Ireland, England and Wales and Scotland;
- . a time limit within which things can be handed in under a decommissioning scheme and thus take advantage of the amnesty under the Bill;
- . an amnesty from prosecution in respect of certain (many possession-related) offences listed in the Schedule. The amnesty would be available only to those acting in accordance with a decommissioning scheme. It is intended to protect those who commit offences through their participation in decommissioning and is not a general amnesty for terrorist-related offences;
- . a limitation on the use in evidence of things decommissioned or information obtained as a result of the decommissioning process;

. a prohibition, except in certain circumstances, on the forensic testing of decommissioned articles;

. the definition of an independent Commission to facilitate the decommissioning of firearms, ammunition and explosives and a power to confer upon the Commission appropriate legal status, immunities and privileges.

#### NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. The Northern Ireland Arms Decommissioning Bill is intended to reflect and enable effect to be given to the six principles which underlie the detailed guidelines provided by the International Body on decommissioning (chaired by Senator Mitchell).

2. The Bill would not provide for decommissioning schemes themselves but recognises a scheme that the Secretary of State may take (extra-statutorily) and attaches certain immunities to people taking part in decommissioning schemes and to anything handed in in accordance with such a scheme.

3. Such immunities include an amnesty from prosecution in respect of certain (mainly possession-related offences) specified in the Schedule for those acting in accordance with a decommissioning scheme - this is not a general amnesty for all crimes committed in the past. There are also provisions dealing with exemption from forensic examination of armaments made available for decommissioning and limitations on the use in evidence of information obtained as a result of the decommissioning process.

4. The Bill would recognise the establishment of an independent Commission established by agreement between the Governments of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. This Commission would facilitate the decommissioning of firearms, ammunition and explosives.