



Northern Ireland Office

Press Notice

Whitehall, London SW1A 2AZ.
Stormont Castle, Belfast, BT4 3ST.

Telephone Enquiries 071-210 6454
Telephone Enquiries Belfast 520700

L67/96

29 November 1996

NORTHERN IRELAND ARMS DECOMMISSIONING BILL PUBLISHED

The Northern Ireland Arms Decommissioning Bill was published today. Sir Patrick Mayhew QC MP described the Bill as "an important confidence-building measure. Not only would it build the confidence of those decommissioning their weapons but also the confidence of the public at large that weapons were being taken out of the political equation."

The Bill, which would make provision connected with Northern Ireland about the decommissioning of arms and explosives, reflects and gives effect to the Report of the International Body on decommissioning which was chaired by Senator George Mitchell.

The Bill would allow anyone who, acting in accordance with a decommissioning scheme, wished to hand in any arms or explosives to do so without risk of prosecution for being in possession of those arms or explosives. It would also provide that anything handed in could not be used in evidence and could not, except in certain circumstances, be forensically tested. The whole process being overseen by an independent Commission established by agreement between the British and Irish Governments.

Sir Patrick said "The Government is keen to have the legislation enacted as soon as possible. It would provide the immunities from prosecution and prohibition from forensic testing which are deemed necessary to instil confidence in those who might wish to decommission their weaponry."