

S D L P

Response of the SDLP to procedural Questions from the Independent Chairmen 27 November 1996

- 1 Rule 18 of the Rules of Procedure gives each participating party the right to raise any "matter which it considers relevant". This right should be upheld; however, most parties will have understood this provision to refer more particularly to the substantive negotiations. At present we are working through the agreed agenda for the Opening Plenary and we have reached Item 2(c). In the spirit of Rule 18, the Chair should accept, and allow for debate on motions or proposals which relate directly to "mechanisms necessary to enable further progress to be made on decommissioning, alongside negotiations in three strands", and reject proposals which stray substantially beyond this agreed agenda item. (Mr McCartney's motion of 27 November relates exclusively to the terms of entry into the Talks). If, however, the Plenary decides by consensus, or sufficient consensus, to postpone formal proceedings to enable bilaterals to take place with the purpose of achieving consensus or sufficient consensus between participants on agreed Agenda items, then it has a right to do so. Since the objective of the talks is to achieve agreement this is a necessary provision.
- 2 The agenda for the substantive negotiations is sufficiently comprehensive to allow any party to raise any issue of concern to it, when the umbrella item is reached in the course of negotiations.
- 3 Motions should be amendable within reason. However, in order to ensure that debate in plenary does not become unduly complex, because of a large number of amendments and counter-amendments, the Chair should have the discretion to suggest adjournment of the plenary to allow for bilaterals to resolve disagreement over motions.