

Ulster Unionist Party (UUP)

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STATEMENT BY THE RT HON. JOHN D. TAYLOR MP, DEPUTY LEADER OF THE *ULSTER UNIONIST PARTY*

It is clear from the paper produced by the British and Irish Governments that the British Government has abjectly surrendered to the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs and caved in to the requirements of Sinn Fein/IRA. The electoral considerations of the Irish Government, and their desire to achieve any kind of ceasefire before calling an election, clearly carry more weight with this Secretary of State than the need to create public confidence in a process of negotiations that is truly democratic and free of threats of violence.

The British Government has meekly agreed, at the insistence of the Irish Government and the SDLP, to transfer decisions to a special committee to deal with the decommissioning of illegal weapons. The Government cannot have failed to notice that under the Rules of Procedure agreed by all participants no decision in such a committee can be taken without the support of a majority of nationalist participants and a majority of unionist participants (Rule 34).

The special committee he proposes would give nationalists a veto over decommissioning since no decision could be taken without the support of the SDLP. Such an arrangement is totally unacceptable to the Ulster Unionist Party. The UUP will not agree to any proposal which gives the SDLP or any future Irish Government such a veto. The UUP would be highly sceptical of a future Fianna Fail-led Government under Bertie Ahern ever seeking a credible ceasefire as a precondition to substantive negotiations, let alone decommissioning.

The Ulster Unionist Party over the last weeks is the only party to have addressed decommissioning seriously and is the only party which has come forward with a positive proposal. Accepting that the British and Irish Governments will deliver upon their assurances that they will proceed with the necessary enabling legislation for decommissioning, we are prepared to enter into negotiations on the three relationships and are prepared to accept that upon the establishment of a genuine ceasefire, Sinn Fein could enter plenary sessions prior to decommissioning. However they could not enter into the three-stranded mode until, as required by the Mitchell Report, there is some mutual decommissioning by loyalist and republican paramilitaries.

The UUP, while welcoming the fact that the Secretary of State has said his proposal is not a fiat, urges him to rethink his proposals and priorities.

ENDS