

LIAISON SUB-COMMITTEE ON CONFIDENCE BUILDING MEASURES

OPENING STATEMENT BY HMG

Mr Chairman, I am pleased to speak on behalf of the British Government at this first meeting of the Liaison Sub-Committee on Confidence Building Measures.

While the main negotiations are discussing wider constitutional and systemic issues, this Sub-Committee provides a forum for the discussion of associated areas where fears and uncertainties, if left unaddressed, could impede progress towards the lasting agreement which is everyone's goal.

As the Report of the International Body said, "it is important for all participants to take steps to build confidence throughout the peace process". For our part, the British Government is here with a willingness to listen seriously and carefully to what others have to say and to discuss those concerns in relation to issues within our control. All of us, round this table, have a contribution to make in building up each other's confidence, through our words and actions - both within these negotiations and outside.

In that context, it is right to acknowledge that the ceasefires have been the most important step in creating confidence, and we welcome them. But it remains the case that people throughout the community need to continue to receive reassurance that the ceasefires are, indeed, genuine. And the Government also

calls on those terrorist groups which have not declared a ceasefire to cease immediately their wanton campaign of violence.

This Sub-committee's remit has been set out in the procedural motion which the Plenary agreed on 24 September: that is, to assist as appropriate the implementation of the further confidence building measures mentioned in the Report of the International Body and any others agreed by the Plenary. Clearly, we shall have a very full agenda, and we look forward to exploring the issues, to explaining our position, and to discussing the merits of alternative proposals.

We especially hope that the keynote of the Sub-committee's work can indeed be exploration, not recrimination. We all know that emotive issues such as those listed in the International Body's Report can be used in a partisan way, to score points rather than genuinely to build confidence in the process. Confidence building steps can all too often be seen as favouring one side of the community at the expense of the other. The Government is anxious that this Sub-Committee should not fall into that cycle of mistrust.

To help ensure that we jointly approach our work in a way that generates co-operation, not confrontation, the Government believes that it would be worth spending our initial sessions in a **general** discussion of the underlying issues - giving each party represented here the opportunity to say **where** it believes

confidence is most lacking, **who** it believes are the main groups that have it within their gift to enhance confidence, and (paralleling the approach being taken in the strands) what are the **principles and requirements** which might guide our subsequent consideration of individual issues. In our view this would help us collectively put in perspective the difficult issues we are dealing with, and avoid the risk of this Sub-committee falling into a confrontational rather than a constructive mode. I am happy therefore to fall in with the Chairman's proposal on the preparation of papers. I should be happy to table a paper for our next meeting setting out the Government's views on these important issues. I hope that other participants will also agree to prepare such papers to provide the basis for our future discussions.

To conclude, Mr Chairman, this Sub-committee's task is clearly a difficult one, but it is potentially crucial to the success of the process. We in this delegation look forward to sharing in the responsibility of meeting that challenge.