

SINN FEIN AND THE MITCHELL PRINCIPLES, 16 FEBRUARY

Speaking note

1. Chair, it has been the consistent position of the British Government that participation in these negotiations requires total and absolute commitment to the principles of democracy and non violence set out in paragraph 20 of the Report of the International Body. Any party which demonstrably dishonours its commitment to those principles ceases to be eligible to participate in the negotiations.

2. In this connection, colleagues around the table will recall that in their determination of 24 September 1997 the two Government reiterated that they would expect the Republican Movement as a whole to honour the commitment to the Mitchell principles affirmed by Sinn Fein. Applying that same logic, they concluded on 26 January 1998 that the UDP was no longer entitled to participate in the negotiations on account of UFF involvement in sectarian murders.

3. Shortly after 11pm on 9 February two gunmen shot dead Brendan Campbell and seriously wounded his female companion in Brookland Street, Belfast. Just before 1pm the following day a gunman approached a parked car in Dunmurry, Belfast and opened fire, killing the occupant, Robert Dougan, before making his escape in a waiting car. Both murders, like others in recent weeks, were deplorable and inexcusable, and the Government condemns them without reservation.

4. The Chief Constable's firm view is that both these murders were carried out by the Provisional IRA. His assessment is based both on intelligence information available to him, and on evidence obtained in the course of the RUC's investigations to date into the two crimes. Criminal charges have now been preferred in respect of Mr Dougan's murder, and it is therefore not appropriate for me to go into any detail on that. If I were to say any more at this stage it could prejudice the judicial process in that case and put me in breach of the Contempt of Court Act. I can however confirm that the weapon used in the murder of Mr Campbell had also been used in a previous murder - that of Mr Johnston in December 1995 - which was claimed by Direct Action Against Drugs, which the Chief Constable has confirmed is a cover name used by the Provisional IRA.

5. The British Government concurs with the Chief Constable's assessment that the Provisional IRA were responsible for both these murders.

6. I also note that the statement issued by the Provisional IRA on 12 February did not deny that the murders had been carried out by the Provisional IRA.

7. These considerations clearly raise the question of whether Sinn Fein is any longer entitled to participate in these negotiations. I therefore propose that you, Chair, should make appropriate arrangements for a plenary meeting later today at which the parties can express their views on what I have said and on any observations, oral or written, which the Sinn Fein delegation may wish to make.